

**In Six Days: The Creation Study Committee and the PCA's Struggle for
Consensus on Anti-Darwinism**

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**A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in
partial fulfillments of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell
Barksdale Honors College.**

Oxford

May 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like the creation account itself, this thesis began without form, and void. Without the help of several individuals, this thesis would not have been possible, and they deserve recognition for their selfless contributions to this work. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Theresa Levitt for her tireless work of editing countless drafts of the thesis, challenging my assumptions, and encouraging me over the course of three semesters. I would like to extend thanks to Dr. Darren Grem and Dr. Douglas Sullivan-Gonzalez, the second and third readers of my thesis respectively, for their contributions and encouragement. A special thanks is owed to Mr. Wayne Sparkman, Director of the PCA Historical Center, for his prompt and eager response to the numerous documents requests I made throughout my research. Additional thanks extended to Dr. Jack Collins and Mr. Sam Duncan for allowing me to interview them and for providing the structural framework of the thesis. Dr. Steve Shuman supplied the majority of documents from the Grace Presbytery Minutes, and Mr. Roger Collins provided documents for Mississippi Valley Presbytery. I am indebted to both of these men. Without Mrs. Rachel Case, I would have never come across the original documents of the *Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter*, and her insight was tremendously helpful. I would also like to thank Dr. Gregg Davidson for his fresh perspectives and interest in my work throughout. Without all of the aforementioned, this thesis would not have been possible.

ABSTRACT

Michael C. Wilkerson: In Six Days: The Creation Study Committee and the PCA's Struggle for Consensus on Anti-Darwinism

Under the Direction of Dr. Theresa Levitt

This thesis explores the historic struggle and development of the American Evangelical community to form a unified front against naturalistic evolution during the twentieth century: focusing on the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) as a microcosm in the battle for a general consensus. Conservative six-day creationists who felt threatened by more liberal views within the denomination over the issue pressured the 1998 PCA General Assembly to appoint a special Creation Study Committee. The outcome of the work of the committee only broadened acceptable views within the denomination, much to the chagrin of the conservative elders who pushed for the Committee's formation. The central argument of this thesis is that the resolution of the PCA Creation Study Committee findings both mirrored national trends in the ongoing creation and evolution debate, but also highlighted the struggles of a young denomination seeking its own public and private identity within the boundaries of Reformed distinctive. The secondary sources employed for the national movement include Ronald Numbers *The Creationists* (1992) and Michael Ruse's *But Is It Science?* (1988). Primary material

include interviews with Dr. C. John Collins and Mr. Samuel Duncan, chairman of the Committee. Further research was conducted through various General Assembly and Presbytery Minutes, as well as the responses to the decisions reached in these Minutes.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1998, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) formed the Creation Study Committee to explore the complex issues surrounding the Genesis 1-2 creation account. This committee was the culmination of rising tensions within the denomination concerning the proper interpretation of these two chapters and its increasing prominence as an issue of serious contention. The creation narrative had not previously been a matter of intense controversy, but the historical context within which the debate was placed had pushed the issue to the forefront of the denomination. Conservative elders sought closure on the issue, hoping that the denomination would adopt a strictly literal six-day rendering of the creation account. The decision of the 2000 General Assembly on the Committee's findings can only be properly understood in light of the historical moment.

American Christians in general, and Reformed Christians more particularly, felt an acute threat to their worldview from certain naturalistic interpretations of Darwin's theory of evolution by means of natural selection.¹ These naturalistic interpretations excluded supernatural forces as a valid means of explaining the

¹ Darwin, Charles. *The origin of species by means of natural selection: or, the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life and the descent of man and selection in relation to sex*. Modern library, 1872. Witham, Larry A. *Where Darwin meets the Bible: creationists and evolutionists in America*. Oxford University Press, 2005.; McIver, Tom. *Anti-Evolution: A Reader's Guide to Writings Before and After Darwin*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

world, and by the early 20th century many American Christians found themselves on the defensive against broader naturalistic criticisms attacking portions of the Bible that did not fit with empirical observations of natural laws. At the forefront of this attack on Biblical literalism were assaults on passages in the Book of Genesis that narrate a supernatural creation of the universe, the earth, and all life contained therein.

While some Christians were comfortable interpreting Genesis based on the observations of the natural sciences, others saw a clear conflict between the record of Genesis and the claims of empirical science. This second camp, known as scientific creationists, emerged as a vocal minority in America during the 1960s, insisting that the universe and earth are actually quite young, and that biological evolution is not a viable explanation for the origin of species. This position put them at odds with the near unanimous opinion of scientists, but the creationists were unwilling to compromise on their convictions that their interpretation of Genesis was correct and that the Bible offers the only source of authoritative truth.

No Reformed Christian would side with strict naturalism; however, a rift opened in Reformed denominations on the proper interpretation of the Genesis creation account, ushering in a breadth of opinions on the topic. The issue has not abated since its inception, and the recent struggle for consensus within the Presbyterian Church in America, a young, conservative Reformed denomination, offers a unique glimpse into the ideological and theological struggles of the broader Christian community. Tensions within the PCA over the issue led to the formation of a Creation Study Committee in 1998 to give fair hearing to all sides of the debate,

and the results of this committee both mirror and differ from the larger national anti-Darwinian movement. Only by placing the formation of the PCA within the historical context of American anti-Darwinism can one make sense of the convoluted decision of the 2000 PCA General Assembly to commend several mutually exclusive interpretations of Genesis to the sessions and presbyteries of the denomination.

The PCA is a denomination of typically Reformed character, and it emerged from a tradition of religious sectarianism. Since the Reformation itself, reformed denominations have followed the principle of *semper reformada*, always reforming and, if necessary, fracturing when the theology of their respective denominations broadens to a critical point. The PCA followed in the tradition of J. Gresham Machen, who advocated secession and reformation from a broadening of theological opinion, rather than having disparate opinions exist in unity under an ideologically expansive denomination. However, the argument over the proper interpretation of Genesis is unique to the moment in history being examined, as differing opinions on this matter had never before been considered a test of fellowship, so long as certain truths concerning the historicity of Genesis were maintained.

Those seeking a denominational agreement that only ministers holding to young-earth creationism be ordained insisted that young-earth creationism was the historic opinion of the church, as outlined in the Westminster Assembly of 1643-1652. The men seeking this consensus were following in the militant sectarian tradition of Machen by seeking to oust all divergent opinions from the denomination, but this attempt was an abuse of the bounds of acceptable division

for Machen, who did not hold to a young-earth creationist position himself. The final decision of the 2000 General Assembly evidences a denomination struggling for consensus on epistemological identity in an increasingly empirical time. It is not only a story of where one may find authoritative truth, but also of how to interpret the very sources of truth that one goes to. The discussions contained herein raise interesting arguments in the fields of the history of religion, science, and broader theological debates within America.

CHAPTER I: FUNDAMENTALISTS AND CREATIONISTS

Two new classifications of Evangelical Christians emerged in the 20th century that shared a peculiar, though not undivided, alliance. Christian Fundamentalists, those who practice strict literal adherence to the Bible², became prominent during this time, as did the creationists, those who reject Darwinian evolution in favor of a supernatural creative process. Throughout the century, fundamentalists and creationists became wed to each other through shared ideologies. However, a wide range of opinion existed within fundamentalism on what constituted a legitimate literal interpretation, as well as similar latitude for acceptable anti-Darwinian proposals. All Christian creationists believed in a literal interpretation of Genesis, but not all creationists agreed on what that interpretation consisted of. The militant belief in a young earth, a universal Noachian flood, and the special creation of each species within solar days did not gain notable momentum until the 1960s, but it owes much of its success to the anti-Darwinian groundwork laid by its more moderate creationist forerunners.

² Fundamentalism as a whole is more nuanced than this treatment. Different translations of the Bible were abundant, and the fundamentalist movement as a whole was more defined by premillennial dispensationalism. For more on this discussion, see Lindsell, Harold. *The battle for the Bible*. Zondervan, 1976. Dollar, George W. *A history of fundamentalism in America*. Bob Jones University Press, 1973.

Beginning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a split occurred in Christian denominations between those holding to a more literal, and those adopting a figurative or allegorical interpretation of the Bible. This split became known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.³ Although it was occurring across many denominations, it was particularly pervasive within the Presbyterian Church⁴. In 1910, Lyman Stewart, the founder of Union Oil and an ardent supporter of dispensationalism, used his wealth to support the publication of several pamphlets and essays from a multid denominational effort that was called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*.⁵ Also at this time, Cyrus I. Scofield published his famous *Scofield Reference Bible*, which became a standard for fundamentalists and dispensationalists in particular.⁶ This period was formative for Christianity in America, as Christians began moving into two separate camps based on their own personal interpretation of the Scriptures.

For Presbyterians, the leader in the fight against the liberalizing of Christianity was Dr. J. Gresham Machen, a professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary from 1906 to 1929 who led a withdrawal movement from the Northern Presbyterian Church to form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and

³ Marsden, George. *Understanding fundamentalism and evangelicalism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991. Gatewood, Willard B., ed. *Controversy in the twenties: fundamentalism, modernism, and evolution*. Vanderbilt University Press, 1969. Furniss, Norman F. *The fundamentalist controversy, 1918-1931*. Vol. 59. Archon books, 1963.

⁴ Longfield, Bradley J. *The Presbyterian controversy: Fundamentalists, modernists, and moderates*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1991.

⁵ Dixon, A. C. "1915." *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (1910).

⁶ *The Scofield Reference Bible. The Holy Bible... Edited by Rev. CI Scofield, Etc.* Oxford University Press, 1917.

Westminster Theological Seminary.⁷ His approach to liberal opposition, highlighted in his book *Christianity and Liberalism*, was to secede from the liberal influences.⁸ In his magnum opus, he lamented that “modern naturalistic liberalism” had over “the past one hundred years” began “a new era in human history”.⁹ This new era had been occasioned by the “application of modern scientific methods”, and he feared that “no department of knowledge can maintain its isolation from the modern lust of scientific conquests”.¹⁰ These modern scientific methods applied scientific methodology to all spheres, including those of the humanities. No institution was safe from the conquering spirit of scientific investigation, and Christianity was already under vicious attack. Machen doubted “whether first-century religion can ever stand in company with twentieth-century science”.¹¹ Machen asked the question that most serious intellectual Christians of the time were grappling with, namely, “may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age?”¹² There could be no mere separation of the two spheres, the religious and the scientific, in this new modern age. “In the intellectual battle of the present day there can be no ‘peace without victory’; one side or the other must win”.¹³

While it might initially appear that Machen was opposed to science in favor of holding fast to religious dogma, this was hardly the case. He did not believe that it

⁷ See Petersen, David. "Southern Presbyterian Conservatives and Ecclesiastical Division: The Formation of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1926-1973." (2009).

⁸ Machen, J. Gresham. "Christianity and Liberalism. 1923. Grand Rapids, MI: William B." (1946).

⁹ Machen, 2

¹⁰ Machen, 3

¹¹ Machen, 4

¹² Machen, 6

¹³ Machen, 6

was “the Christianity of the New Testament which is in conflict with science, but the supposed Christianity of the modern liberal Church”, and his chief concern in his work was to show that “modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions”.¹⁴ Commenting on the influence of Machen, historian George M. Marsden pointed out that Machen “declined to join in the antievolution crusade”.¹⁵ His legacy was one of insistent “ecclesiastical separatism”, not antievolution polemic.¹⁶ Machen was a protégé of the Old School Princeton Theologians Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield, both defenders of “solid empirical science and to the concursus of divine and natural action”.¹⁷ Warfield was such a staunch defender of a literal interpretation of Scripture, that he actually is credited with coining the term “inerrancy”.¹⁸ Their views on the creation account were nuanced; Machen, Hodge, nor Warfield did not hold to a literal 24-hour day creation account.¹⁹ Machen advocated secession from liberalism, which “provided not only an acceptable, but in many respects an honorable, solution to irreconcilable disagreements of principle”.²⁰ It is significant to note that holding to

¹⁴ Machen, 7

¹⁵ MARSDEN, GEORGE M. "Chapter 7: Understanding J. Gresham Machen." In *Understanding Fundamentalism & Evangelicalism*, 182-201. n.p.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 3, 2016). p. 182

¹⁶ Marsden, 184

¹⁷ Knoll, Mark. "Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield on Science, the Bible, Evolution, and Darwinism." *Modern Reformation* 7, no. 3 (May 1998): 18-22.
<http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var2=580>.

¹⁸ MARSDEN, GEORGE M. "Chapter 6: Why Creation Science?" In *Understanding Fundamentalism & Evangelicalism*, 153-181. n.p.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 6, 2016). p. 156

¹⁹ Hodge, Charles. *What is Darwinism?: and other writings on science and religion*. Edited by David N. Livingstone, and Mark A. Noll. Baker Book House, 1994.(original publication in 1874); Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge, Mark A. Noll, and David N. Livingstone, eds. *Evolution, scripture, and science: selected writings*. Baker Publishing Group, 2000.; Livingstone, David N. *Darwin's forgotten defenders*. Regent College Publishing, 2001.

²⁰ Longfield, 122

some aspects of divine guidance over natural processes in the creation account did not amount to “irreconcilable disagreements of principle” for these giants of conservative Presbyterian theology, and did not fall into the category of divisive issues that warranted schism.

Surprisingly, given the current context, many of the most conservative and fundamental theologians in America during the early 20th century had few qualms with the idea that the earth was very old, far older than the 6,000-10,000 year time frame currently espoused by many young-earth creationists. George Frederick Wright, an amateur geologist and Congregational minister, was a prominent Christian Darwinist who proposed that, “the intended purpose of Genesis was to protest polytheism, not to teach science”.²¹ The *Scofield Reference Bible* held to a theory known as gap theory, which sought reconciliation between science and Biblical interpretation. In this theory, Genesis 1-3 actually recounts two separate creations. The “in the beginning” of Genesis 1:1 referred to the first creation “perhaps billions of years ago” and a second, six-day creation occurred “approximately four thousand years before the birth of Christ”.²² Animal life perished catastrophically between the first and second creations, and the remnants of this animal life is what can be found in the fossil record.²³ This accommodation of Scripture to the fossil record allowed fundamental theologians who clung tightly to the *Scofield Reference Bible* to still believe in a special creation of human beings.

²¹ Ruse, Michael. "But is it science?: the philosophical question in the creation/evolution controversy." (1988). p. 230 referencing Frederick, Wright G. "The First Chapter of Genesis and Modern Science." *Homiletic Review* 35 (1898): 392-99. Print.

²² Ruse, 228

²³ Numbers, Ronald L. *The creationists*. Alfred a Knopf Inc, 1992. p.46

Belief in the special creation of human beings was the crux of the argument for most avowed fundamentalists. Theologians such as Charles Hodge supposed that Darwinism led to strict naturalism, which would eventually lead to atheism in America.²⁴ Perhaps the most combatant politician of this time, who held to the gap-theory and to the special creation of man, was the populist William Jennings Bryan. A politician in the wake of the carnage of World War I, Bryan saw in Darwinism support for “a dangerous theory based on ‘the law of hate’”.²⁵ Survival of the fittest was seen as an anti-populist message, and Bryan was afraid that subscribing to it would throw the Western world back into the bloodshed and violence of a world at war. He was particularly wary of Darwinism being taught in public schools to impressionable youth growing up in an age of uncertainty. Bryan argued for the cessation of the attack on the Bible in public schools and the teaching of evolution until it had satisfactorily proven and had persuaded a clear majority.²⁶

William Jennings Bryan led a nationwide crusade against the teaching of evolution in public schools that eventually culminated in the notorious Scopes “Monkey” Trial.²⁷ The Scopes Trial was a legal case in 1925 between the state of Tennessee and a substitute high-school biology teacher named John Scopes.²⁸ Scopes violated Tennessee’s Butler Act by teaching evolution in a Dayton,

²⁴ Ruse, 228

²⁵ Smout, Kary D. *The creation/evolution controversy: a battle for cultural power*. Praeger, 1998. p.49 citing Williams Jennings Bryan from Bryan, William J. "The Prince of Peace." *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan* 2 (1904): 267-69. Print.

²⁶ Smout, 53 drawing from Bryan, William J. "The Origin of Man." *Seven Questions in Dispute*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1924. 123-58. Print.

²⁷ Conkin, Paul Keith. *When all the gods trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American intellectuals*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

²⁸ Israel, Charles Alan. *Before scopes: evangelicalism, education, and evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925*. University of Georgia Press, 2004.

Tennessee, high school. The subsequent trial of John Scopes set the stage for a showdown between fundamentalists and modernists, led by the prosecuting attorney William Jennings Bryan and the defense attorney Clarence Darrow, respectively.²⁹ Over the course of the trial, Bryan was forced to admit that he did not believe that the days of Genesis were six literal solar days.³⁰ In private, he later admitted that so long as humans were not the product of evolution from lower life forms, he could accept evolution generally.³¹ John Scopes was indicted, though the verdict was later overturned. The outcome of this trial was a perceived victory for fundamentalists, despite the scathing and embarrassing cross-examination of Bryan by Darrow. Bryan's cross-examination at Dayton spotlighted a major chink in the armor for anti-evolutionists: their inability to agree on which theory of creation was the most viable alternative to Darwinian evolution.³²

The anti-evolution movement was far from unified, and three theories competed for the majority view. Strict six-day, young earth creationists abounded, but so did gap-theorists and day-age theorists. Six-day creationists took comfort from the work of George McCready Price, who published a monumental work in 1923 called *The New Geology*.³³ This work laid the foundations of catastrophism, the

²⁹ Larson, Edward J. *Summer for the gods: The Scopes trial and America's continuing debate over science and religion*. Basic books, 2008. and Larson, Edward J. *The creation-evolution debate: Historical perspectives*. Vol. 3. University of Georgia Press, 2008.

³⁰ Smout, 70

³¹ Smout, 70 referencing Marsden, George M. "A Case of the Excluded Middle: Creation versus Evolution in America." In *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious History Hostility in America*, edited by Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspan, 145-46. New York: Crossroads Press, 1987. and Numbers, Ronald L. "The Creationists." In *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and David C. Lindberg, 402-03. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

³² Ruse, 237

³³ Price, George McCready. *The new geology*. Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923.

belief that a worldwide deluge, the Genesis Flood, accounted for the fossil record and various levels of strata that geologists attributed to millions of years of evolutionary history. According to Price, deceptive conformities and thrust faults “proved that there was no natural order to the fossil-bearing rocks, all of which he attributed to the Genesis flood”.³⁴ The day-age theorists believed that each day³⁵ in Genesis corresponded to an indefinite period of time, which allows for vast ages of the Earth in each creation day.³⁶

Despite the admission during the cross-examination of the difficulty of holding fundamental views in light of plain science, the verdict was a conviction for John Scopes. The goal for Clarence Darrow and the defense, however, was to open up the case for an appeal in the hopes that the law might be declared unconstitutional in a higher court. The defense was very aware that they had no chance of avoiding a conviction in the highly fundamental state of Tennessee, but the legal landscape of America was changing. Soon federal laws would take precedence over states’ rights, and the American public school system would find their curriculum not in state court houses but in the Department of Education in Washington, D.C.

The battle for the heart of American public education was far from over after the Scopes Trial, as several later cases would show. Two years after Scopes, in 1926,

³⁴ Ruse, 236

³⁵ The Hebrew word for “day” is *yom*, and the precise meaning of this word is highly contested. See Kelly, Douglas, and Douglas Kelly. *Creation and change*. Christian, 1997. for a detailed treatment

³⁶ Scott, Eugenie C. "Antievolution and creationism in the United States." *Annual Review of Anthropology* (1997): 263-289.

anti-evolutionists won a legislative victory in Mississippi and then again two years later in Arkansas.³⁷ Additionally, anti-evolutionists set out on a campaign to “emasculate textbooks, purge libraries, and hound teachers of evolution”.³⁸ Under these tactics, “Darwinism virtually disappeared from high school texts, and for years many American teachers feared being identified as evolutionists”.³⁹ The Deep South became a victorious battleground for anti-evolutionists.

Another, more vital, effort came out of the aftermath of the Scopes Trial. Fundamentalists refocused their energy towards establishing a centralized institutional base from which they could reach out and evangelize their anti-evolution materials to the larger world. This base consisted of “radio ministries, colleges, and the all-important Bible institutes, the greatest of which was the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago”.⁴⁰ In the 1930s, they relaxed the pressure that had formerly pressed on state legislatures, and began localized pressure of school boards through the use of creationist societies. George McCready Price, Dudley Joseph Whitney, and L. Allen Higley, formed one such society, the Religion and

³⁷ Ruse, 238 referencing Shipley, Maynard. *The War on Modern Science: A Short History of the Fundamentalist Attacks on Evolution and Modernism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927. For the use of precedent, see *Epperson v. State of Ark.*, 21 L. Ed. 2d 228, 89 S. Ct. 266, 393 U.S. 97 (Supreme Court 1968).

³⁸ Ruse, 238 referencing Shipley, Maynard. "Growth of the Anti-Evolution Movement." *Current History* 32 (1930).

³⁹ Ruse, 238 referencing Beale, Howard K. *Are American Teachers Free? An Analysis of Restraints upon the Freedom of Teaching in American Schools*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936. p.228-37; Gatewood, Jr., William J. *Preachers, Pedagogues and Politicians: The Evolution Controversy in North Carolina, 1920-1927*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966. p.39; Grabiner, Judith V., and Peter D. Miller. "Effects of the Scopes Trial." *Science* 185 (1974): 832-37.; Laba, Estelle R., and Eugene W. Gross. "Evolution Slighted in High-School Biology." *Clearing House* 24 (1950): 396-99.

⁴⁰ Numbers, 103 referencing Carpenter, Joel A. "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942." *Church History* 49 (1980): 62-65.; Trollinger, Jr., William V. *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.; Brereton, Virginia L. *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Science Association, in 1935. This society was formed to create “a united front against the theory of evolution”.⁴¹ Price also organized his own Deluge Geology Society in 1938, which began publishing from 1941-1945 a *Bulletin of Deluge Geology and Related Science*.⁴²

This campaign to wage a war of information with modernists was spurred partially by the negative press fundamentalists were receiving in the wake of the Scopes Trial. While the case could technically be considered a victory for evolution, the cross-examination of Bryan did not help the cause of fundamentalism in the eyes of the American public. The Scopes Trial fused two forces that perhaps would not have been joined together had the trial never occurred: evolution and higher criticism. Before the Scopes Trial, conservative Christians saw higher criticism as the greater threat to orthodox faith, but the Scopes Trial highlighted the negative effects of reading the Bible as a historical document and not as the inspired Word of God. In fact, one contributor to *The Fundamentals* “traced the roots of higher criticism to Darwin.” and labeled it as “the principal cause of disbelief in the Scriptures”⁴³

During this transitional phase for the anti-evolutionists, a new problem became readily apparent – young, college-educated scientists aiming to harmonize

⁴¹ Ruse, 239 citing Dudley Joseph Whitney, founder of the Religion and Science Association from “Announcement of the Religion and Science Association” (Price Papers); “The Religion and Science Association” (1936, 159-160); “Meeting of the Religion and Science Association” (1936, 209); see also Clark, Harold W. *The Battle Over Genesis*. Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977.

⁴² Ruse, 239; see also Bergman, Gerald. “A short history of the modern creation movement and the continuing modern cultural wars.” *The Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 2 (2003): 243-262.

⁴³ Ruse, 229 referencing Mauro, Phillip. “Modern Philosophy.” *The Fundamentals* 2 (1910-1915): 85-105.

evangelical Christianity with mainstream science.⁴⁴ A case in point for this cross-generational struggle can be seen in Harold W. Clark. Clark was a pupil of Price, and after earning a master's degree in biology from the University of California, he became a professor at an Adventist college in the state. However, by the 1940s, his exposure in academia as well as his personal explorations in biology led him to believe that Price's *New Geology* was "entirely out of date and inadequate".⁴⁵ Price was understandably mortified at this challenge to his geological prowess⁴⁶, and his response to Clark was both personal and revealing. Price accused Clark of falling to the seductive lies of "tobacco-smoking, Sabbath-breaking, God-defying evolutionists".⁴⁷ Price even went so far as to release a pamphlet entitled *Theories of Satanic Origin*, attacking his one time student and confidant.⁴⁸

The American Scientific Affiliation (ASA) further departed from the creationist, catastrophist geological views of Price. One of its members, J. Laurence Kulp, earned his Ph.D. in geology from Princeton University. He criticized Price's *New Geology* and warned that Price's work has "infiltrated the greater portion of fundamental Christianity in America primarily due to the absence of trained Christian geologists... the major propositions of the theory are contradicted by

⁴⁴ Ruse, 239

⁴⁵ Ruse, 239 from letters in the possession of Ronald Numbers, H.W. Clark to G.M. Price, [April 9, 1940] in Price Papers

⁴⁶ For an early manuscript of the geology of GM Price see Price, George McCready. *The Fundamentals of Geology and Their Bearings on the Doctrine of a Literal Creation*. Pacific Press publishing association, 1913.

⁴⁷ Ruse, 239 from letters in the possession of Ronald Numbers, G.M. Price to H.W. Clark, June 9, 1940 in Price Papers

⁴⁸ Numbers, 128; see Price, George M. *Theories of Satanic Origin*. Loma Linda, CA: Author. n.d.

established physical and chemical laws”.⁴⁹ Societies like the ASA were home to many members who were drifting first from strict creationism to a more progressive form of creationism and eventually to outright theistic evolution. As more Christian geologists became university trained, they began to become suspicious of the authority of Price and relied more on what they had been taught from their respective schools. Ronald Numbers notes “by 1948, many evangelical scientists in the ASA were ready to follow Kulp in boldly shedding the trite fundamentalism apologetics of the past” in the name of “scientific honesty”.⁵⁰ A split between the old and new schools would soon emerge.

Bernard Ramm, a theologian close to the ASA, published in 1954 a most significant book – *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*.⁵¹ This book guided its readers away from strict creationism towards a more progressive creationism, which cast doubt on a young earth theory, the universal Noachian flood, and the man’s recent arrival.⁵² Ramm was the leader of a new strand of evangelicals who were attempting to distance themselves from old school fundamentalism. *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* challenged the view that the Bible could or even should be a “reliable source of scientific data”.⁵³ His book was wildly popular, earning the respect and support of distinguished evangelicals such as Billy Graham.

⁴⁹ Ruse, 240 citing Kulp, Laurence J. "Deluge Geology." *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 2 (March 1950): 1-15. See also Kulp, Laurence J. "Some Presuppositions of Evolutionary Thinking." *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 1 (June 1949).

⁵⁰ Numbers, 165

⁵¹ Ramm, Bernard L. *The Christian view of science and Scripture*. WB Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1955.

⁵² Numbers, 184

⁵³ Numbers, 184 from Bernard Ramm to R.L. Numbers, May 30, 1991; See also Marsden, George M. *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987.

Ramm accused the once hallowed Harry Rimmer⁵⁴ and George McReady Price of imposing the untrustworthy gap and flood theories on unsuspecting Christians.⁵⁵ Catastrophism found no support in actual geological scholarship, and the flood and gap theories were incompatible with each other as evidence for geological ages.⁵⁶

Progressive creationism offered a counter proposal to the flood and gap theories. This proposal encouraged Christians to think of Genesis as offering a rough sketch of Earth's history. P.J. Wiseman, a notable progressive creationist, concluded, "creation was *revealed* [pictorially] in six days, not *performed* in six days".⁵⁷ According to this new brand of Christian thinkers, the whole point of Genesis 1-3 was to show how God had prepared Earth and made it suitable for human life – as humans were the crowning achievement of God's guidance of evolution. Despite selling tens of thousands of copies, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* did not to garner a supportive majority among evangelical scientists.⁵⁸

Rather than winning over the crowds of evangelical Christians seeking answers on this decisive issue, the work of progressive creationists like Ramm and Wiseman only opened the door for an intense conservative backlash. The 1960s saw a revival of young-earth creationism, and from this backlash emerged John C. Whitcomb, Jr., one of the most influential young-earth creationists of the 20th

⁵⁴ Rimmer, Harry. *Modern Science and the Genesis Record*. Vol. 2. Bern witness com, 1945. and Rimmer, Harry. *The Harmony of Science and Scripture*. Vol. 1. Berne Witness Company, 1943.

⁵⁵ Numbers, 186

⁵⁶ Numbers, 186

⁵⁷ Numbers, 186 citing Ramm's adoption of Wiseman's position; from *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* pp.220-8, 271-2. For Wiseman's work see Wiseman, Percy John. *New discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*. Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1939. and Wiseman, Percy John. *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis: A Case for Literary Unity*. Edited by Donald John Wiseman. T. Nelson Publishers, 1985.

⁵⁸ Numbers, 187

century. Whitcomb was a professor of Old Testament at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana. At the 1953 annual convention of the ASA, Whitcomb heard the presentation “The Biblical Evidence for a Recent Creation and Universal Deluge” from Henry M. Morris, a civil engineer graduate from Rice University.⁵⁹ This presentation was highly persuasive, as it defended flood geology against the progressive creationists views prevalent at the time in the ASA. The encounter between Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, Jr., at the 1953 ASA convention sparked a friendship between two men who would become champions of young-earth creationism for a disillusioned generation of evangelicals.

Bolstered with confidence from this encounter, and receiving much support from the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), John Whitcomb made it his mission to write a Th.D. dissertation denouncing the work of Ramm. Whitcomb condemned Ramm’s book as being “a rallying-point for the ‘New Deism’”.⁶⁰ Whitcomb had a 450-page dissertation entitled “The Genesis Flood” completed by 1957.⁶¹ Moody Press, an evangelical publisher, agreed to take the project into their hands. Whitcomb struggled to find any legitimate support from geological scientists, and he quickly realized that he needed a collaborator before his book could be published. After many Christian geologists turned his offer for co-authorship down, he turned to Henry Morris in desperation. Morris was reluctant at first, but he eventually agreed

⁵⁹ Numbers, 188 from letters of H.M. Morris to J.C. Whitcomb, September 22, 1953, and J.C. Whitcomb to W.J. Tinkle, July 13, 1955, both in the Whitcomb Papers. The printed program of the 1953 ASA convention carried an abstract of Morris’s paper.

⁶⁰ Numbers, 189 referencing J.C. Whitcomb, “A Questionnaire on Creation and the Flood,” [1955], and J.C. Whitcomb to H.M. Morris, October 8, 1955, both in the Whitcomb Papers

⁶¹ Numbers, 189; John C. Whitcomb, Jr. “The Genesis Flood: An Investigation of Its Geographical Extent, Geologic Effects, and Chronological Setting” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1957)

to co-author the book with Whitcomb. As Numbers notes, “thus was sealed the pact that would soon make ‘Whitcomb and Morris’ a by-word among evangelical Christians”.⁶²

Whitcomb and Morris teamed up in 1957, when Henry Morris was dean of the civil engineering program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Initially Morris was slated to write only around 100 pages of the book, but he contributed nearly 350 pages and “eventually overshadowed Whitcomb’s shrinking contribution by better than a two-to-one margin”.⁶³ By 1961, the long awaited project was complete, and the two men released the 500-page *The Genesis Flood*.⁶⁴

Historian Kary Smout calls the publication of *The Genesis Flood* “perhaps the most significant event in the recent development of American creationism”.⁶⁵

However, the methodology of the book was questionable at best. From the onset of the book Whitcomb and Morris admitted that the literal belief in the account of Genesis informed their quest, and that they sought evidence in nature to support their presupposition of Biblical inerrancy.⁶⁶ Their approach to science was one of compiling scientific data that favored creation against evolution.⁶⁷ This tactic characterized the career of these two men, and it sparked a revival in creationism.

The Genesis Flood was a wildly successful publication, selling in its first decade tens of thousands of copies.⁶⁸ In the eyes of biblical catastrophists, it had the

⁶² Numbers, 192

⁶³ Numbers, 197

⁶⁴ *The Genesis Flood*. Master Books, 1989.

⁶⁵ Smout, 111

⁶⁶ Morris, Whitcomb 1

⁶⁷ Smout, 111

⁶⁸ Numbers, 204

appearance of intellectual respectability, while one opponent denounced it “as a reissue of G.M. Price’s views brought up to date”.⁶⁹ This work had the appearance of a legitimate scientific contribution, but many of the sales were likely the result of the rebuttals of its most fierce opponents.⁷⁰ No publicity is bad publicity, however, and the release of this work instantly pushed Whitcomb and Morris into the limelight of stardom for creationists. Within 25 years, their book went through twenty-nine printings and sold over 200,000 copies, turning these two men into celebrities, as Numbers puts it, “famous among fundamentalists as the Davids who slew the Goliath of evolution”.⁷¹

A slew of publications followed in the wake of *The Genesis Flood*. John C. Whitcomb published *The Early Earth*⁷² in 1972, a work against the gap-theory; *The World That Perished*⁷³ in 1973, a return to the topic of flood geology; and *The Moon: Its Creation, Form and Significance*⁷⁴ in 1978. Morris became a keynote speaker for many creationist audiences throughout the country, and he even earned a speaking spot at the Houston Geological Society. He gave a lecture there on biblical catastrophism, but he faced a very unreceptive audience. In fact, the president of a local geological society “quipped that ‘evidently Dr. Morris doesn’t know that we know it takes 6,000 years to make an inch of limestone’ at the close of his speech”.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Numbers, 204 citing Allen, Roy M. "Letter to the Editor." *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 17 (June 1965): 62.

⁷⁰ Numbers, 204

⁷¹ Numbers, 209

⁷² Whitcomb, John C. "The Early Earth rev. ed." *Grand Rapids, Baker* (1986).

⁷³ Whitcomb, John Clement. *The world that perished*. Baker Book House, 1973.

⁷⁴ Whitcomb, John Clement, and Donald B. De Young. "The Moon: its creation, form and significance." *Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, c1978*. 1 (1978).

⁷⁵ Numbers, 210. H.M. Morris, "Biblical Catastrophism and Geology," unpublished paper presented to the Houston Geological Society, September 10, 1962, Price Papers; H.M. Morris to J.C.

Morris and Whitcomb received practically no recognition in the scientific community despite their popularity in conservative religious circles.⁷⁶

As a theologian, John C. Whitcomb could comfortably answer his critics and admirers in the Christian religious community. Henry M. Morris, on the other hand, was an engineering educator at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, home to one of the more reputable civil engineering programs in the country. Additionally, he was an officer of the American Society for Engineering Education, a member of the editorial board for the *Journal of Engineering Education*, and the author of an extensively used textbook, *Applied Hydraulics in Engineering*.⁷⁷ After the arrival of a new dean of engineering, Willis G. Worchester, pressure began mounting for Morris to step down from his post at VPI. Morris left the faculty voluntarily in 1969.

Several leading creationists now saw a need to form an informal society with the intent of performing actual research on the issues of flood geology and to study the effects of the Genesis flood on the natural world. Headlining this association was the geneticist Walter E. Lammerts⁷⁸, a defector from the Deluge Geology Society and the American Scientific Affiliation. He, along with Whitcomb and Morris, set out to form a “Team of Ten” men that would become the Creation Research Society, the foremost creationist organization of its time.⁷⁹ The society formally began in 1963,

Whitcomb, September 15, 1962, Whitcomb Papers. The Houston lecture subsequently appeared as a pamphlet titled *Biblical Catastrophism and Geology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963).

⁷⁶ Numbers, 210

⁷⁷ Numbers, 212; Morris, Henry Madison, and James M. Wiggert. "Applied hydraulics in engineering." In *Applied hydraulics in engineering*. Ronald Press, 1972.

⁷⁸ Lammerts, Walter E. *Why Not Creation?*. Vol. 1964. Creation Research Society Books, 1970.

⁷⁹ Numbers, 215; for a sampling of this society's work, see Lammerts, Walter Edward. *Scientific studies in special creation*. Creation Research Society, 1990.

and its mission statement ended up being much more broad than Whitcomb or Lammerts envisioned. It did not mandate acceptance of flood geology or recent creation, but it did bar non-Christians from membership.⁸⁰ The central focus of the CRS was research and education, not evangelism or political engagement, and with its scanty resources, it focused its attention on publishing the periodical *Quarterly* and the publication of a high-school biology textbook. This dream was finally realized with the publication of president Henry M. Morris' *Biology: A Search for Order in Complexity* (1970).⁸¹

The revival of creationism in the 1960s would finally garner the public attention it so desperately desired, though not in the way that it originally intended. An unexpected vote from the California State Board of Education required that public school textbooks include creation alongside evolution in the classroom.⁸² California became the battleground over public school textbook curriculum, and the fight would once again enter the public sphere. After the 1961 Supreme Court ruling in the Madalyn Murray case that would ban required prayers in public schools, Nell Segraves sought to protect her children from secular influence in California public schools.⁸³ She asserted that likeminded creationists' parents "were entitled to protect our children from the influence of beliefs that would be offensive to our

⁸⁰ Numbers, 230

⁸¹ Numbers, 241; Morris, Henry M. "Biology: A Search for Order in Complexity." edited by John N. Moore and Harold S. Slusher, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.

⁸² Ruse, 244; Bates, Vernon L. *Christian Fundamentalism and the Theory of Evolution in Public School Education: A Study of the Creation Science Movement*. Davis, CA: University of California, 1979. Wade, Nicholas. "Creationists and Evolutionists: Confrontation in California." *Science* 178 (1972): 724-29.

⁸³ Engel, David E. *Religion in Public Education: Problems and Prospects*. Paulist Press, 1974.

religious beliefs”.⁸⁴ After the victory in the California State Board of Education to allow creationism to be taught alongside evolution, she joined in on the effort to organize a Creation-Science Research Center (CSRC), in affiliation with Christian Heritage College in San Diego.⁸⁵ Recently retired from his post at VPI, Henry M. Morris set up a research society, the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), at Christian Heritage College to serve as a center of research and education rather than political engagement.⁸⁶

Creationists found momentum in the California education movement, prompting Henry Morris to announce, “creationism is on the way back, this time not primarily as a religious belief, but as an alternative scientific explanation of the world in which we live”.⁸⁷ From his new post as academic vice chancellor in San Diego, Morris taught a course titled “Scientific Creationism” at Christian Heritage. This shift in terminology put creationism and evolution on equal footing in Morris’ eyes, and he described them as “competing scientific hypotheses”.⁸⁸ In 1972, the Creation Research Society began promoting the term “creation science” to lend even further credibility to the science of creationism.⁸⁹ Essentially, this shift in terminology only mirrored the efforts of the pre-existing creationism movement.

⁸⁴ Ruse, 245

⁸⁵ Ruse, 245

⁸⁶ Ruse, 245

⁸⁷ Numbers, 244 citing from Morris, Henry M. *The Troubled Waters of Evolution*. San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1974. p. 16

⁸⁸ Numbers, 245 citing from Morris, Henry M. "Comments from President Morris." *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 8 (1971-1972): 147-50.

⁸⁹ Numbers, 245

The goal was to amass viable scientific data for creation, and in 1974 Henry Morris released a book entitled *Scientific Creationism* compiling the evidence.⁹⁰

There are subtle differences in the terminology, however, which are not insignificant. A 1981 Arkansas law requiring “balanced treatment” for creation and evolution in education succinctly clarified what was meant by creation science in six essential beliefs.⁹¹ This Arkansas statute outlined creation science as being encompassed by:

(1) Sudden creation of the universe, energy, and life from nothing; (2) The insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development of all living kinds from a single organism; (3) Changes only within fixed limits of originally created kinds of plants and animals; (4) Separate ancestry for man and apes; (5) Explanation of the earth’s geology by catastrophism, including the occurrence of a worldwide flood; and (6) A relatively recent inception of the earth and living kinds.⁹²

The definition diverges from the old creationist school in several significant ways. For one, this included a call for geological catastrophism, which would have been an outlier opinion before the 1960s. Henry Morris saw the Genesis flood as “the real crux of the conflict between the evolutionists and creationists cosmologies”.⁹³ While placing an increased emphasis on the Genesis flood, Morris encouraged scientific creationists to omit as facts “the six days of creation, the

⁹⁰ Smout, 111; Morris, Henry M. *Scientific creationism*. New Leaf Publishing Group, 1974.

⁹¹ Numbers, 245

⁹² "Creationism in schools: The decision in McLean versus the Arkansas Board of Education." *Science* 215, no. 4535 (1982): 934-943.

⁹³ Numbers, 245 citing Morris, Henry M. *Scientific Creationism*. San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1974. p. 252

names of the first man and woman, the record of God's curse on the earth because of human sin, the story of Noah's ark, and other such events which could never be determined scientifically".⁹⁴ They also introduced evidence from the fossil record, which has no mention in the Bible. By doing this, Morris and the other adherents of scientific creationism hoped to lend credibility to their views as a science rather than as a movement completely rooted in the narratives of Genesis 1-3 and 6-9. Despite this, Morris was inconsistent by insisting that one could arrive at his conclusions without specific reference to the Bible all the while affirming, "only in the Bible can one find this concept of special creation".⁹⁵ His 1974 book *Scientific Creationism* appeared in two practically indistinguishable editions: one for public schools (which did not reference the Bible) and one for Christian schools (which did reference the Bible).⁹⁶

Creation scientists had to attempt to change the way science was perceived in order to defend their claims to empirical truths. Two philosophers were quite influential in this pursuit: Karl Popper⁹⁷ and Thomas Kuhn⁹⁸. Popper required that all theories in science must be falsifiable; thinking in this vein led creation scientists to reject evolution on the premise that it could not be falsified (and therefore did not constitute science). Kuhn did not see science as a continuous gathering of objective knowledge, but allowed for competing models on the same issue. Creation scientists

⁹⁴ Numbers, 245 citing from Morris, Henry Madison, and Gary Parker. *What is creation science?*. New Leaf Publishing Group, 1987. p. 264

⁹⁵ Numbers, 245 citing Morris, Henry M. "Director's Column." *Acts & Facts* 4, no. 3 (October 1975)

⁹⁶ Numbers, 246

⁹⁷ Popper, Karl. *The logic of scientific discovery*. Routledge, 2005.

⁹⁸ Kuhn, Thomas S. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago press, 2012.

saw no reason why an accumulation of knowledge in support of flood-geology could be bad for science, as it expanded paradigms and offered alternative theories to the same questions.⁹⁹ Creationists were advised to appeal to school boards with the premise that banning the teaching of creation as an alternative theory to evolution in public schools was tantamount to censorship and “smacked of getting into the province of religious dogma”.¹⁰⁰ This two-model approach to the issue of origins won support in the state legislatures of Arkansas and Louisiana, but in 1982 the Arkansas law requiring “balanced treatment” of creation and evolution was declared unconstitutional by a federal judge. In 1985, a synonymous decision was reached for the Louisiana law.¹⁰¹

The heart of this issue became properly defining the terms religion and science. The National Academy of Sciences released a booklet entitled *Science and Creationism* in 1984 in which they challenged creation science as being a misnomer.¹⁰² The United States Constitution does not ban the teaching of poor science in public schools, only the teaching of religion. Essentially, both sides in the debate accused the other of practicing pseudo-science on the premise that their theories were not falsifiable. Harvard Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould concluded that scientific creationism is at once false and unfalsifiable, a discordant harmony indeed.¹⁰³ He summed this up by stating that the necessary tenets of creationism

⁹⁹ Ruse, 246

¹⁰⁰ Ruse, 246 citing Leitch, Russell H. "Mistakes Creationists Make." *Bible-Science Newsletter* 18 (March 1980): 2.

¹⁰¹ Ruse, 246; Powell Jr, Lewis F. "Edwards v. Aguillard." (1986).

¹⁰² Numbers, 248; National Academy of Sciences Staff. *Science and creationism: A view from the National Academy of Sciences*. National Academies Press, 1984.

¹⁰³ Numbers, 249 referencing a citation from Gould, Stephen J. "Creationism: Genesis vs. Geology." In *Science and Creationism*, edited by Ashley Montagu, 129. New York: Oxford University

“cannot be tested and its peripheral claims, which can be tested, have been proven false.”¹⁰⁴ During the Arkansas trial appeal to the Supreme Court, Michael Ruse advised Judge William Overton on “the essential characteristics of science” which included “naturalness, tentativeness, testability, and falsifiability”.¹⁰⁵ Judge Overton agreed with Ruse that scientific creationism failed to meet these criteria and that teaching it was an unconstitutional advancement of religion and not science.

The campaign for balanced treatment in public schools having suffered a major setback, the creationists of the 1980s now devoted most of their energy to proselytizing in the public sphere. Notable creation scientists engaged in numerous debates, usually on college campuses. The ICR staff singlehandedly took part in over one hundred of these debates throughout the 1970s, never losing one (by their own account).¹⁰⁶ Morris himself was not fond of these public confrontations, favoring factual lectures, but he valued them for proselytizing to “more non-Christians and non-creationists than almost any other method”.¹⁰⁷ Unlike Morris, Duane T. Gish, a giant in this movement and a vehement debater, preferred open confrontation. Gish held a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of California, which he brought into

Press, 1984.; see also Gould, Stephen Jay. "The verdict on creationism." *New York Times Magazine* 19 (1987): 32-34.

¹⁰⁴ Numbers, 249

¹⁰⁵ Numbers, 250 citing Ruse, Michael. "Creation-Science is Not Science." In *Creationism, Science, and the Law: The Arkansas Case*, edited by Marcel C. La Follette, 150-60. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.

¹⁰⁶ Ruse, 246

¹⁰⁷ Ruse, 246 citing from Morris, Henry M. *The Troubled Waters of Evolution*. San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1974. p. 2

his fiery debates.¹⁰⁸ According to his own reckoning, Gish went “for the jugular vein” of his opponents.¹⁰⁹

In addition to the public debate campaign, the ICR turned its attention to training and equipping young university trained creation scientists. The ICR was determined to not see resurgence in the defecting mistakes evidenced in the Harold W. Clark case. In 1981, the ICR began a graduate degree program in assorted creation-oriented fields.¹¹⁰ Their vision was to bridge the gap in the demand for creation science teachers, as well as to provide a prejudice free academic environment for interested students. Students holding to creationists’ views at secular universities reported discrimination for their unorthodox beliefs, and were even reportedly being expelled from school. Leaders of the ICR warned graduate students to hide their beliefs in secular universities “because if you don’t, in almost 99 percent of cases you will be asked to leave”.¹¹¹ To prevent defections to “orthodox” science, and to protect students from discrimination, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church established graduate programs in scientific creationism at Loma Linda University, where Price had once lectured.¹¹² Into the later part of the twentieth century, the ICR and the Seventh-day Adventists’ Geoscience Research Institute did much to advance scientific creationism with tangible scientific data.

The creationist revival of Whitcomb and Morris had a tremendous influence among evangelical Christians, but the crusades support was likely stemming from

¹⁰⁸ Gish, Duane T. *Evolution, the fossils say no!*. Master Books, 1978. and Gish, Duane T. *Evolution: The challenge of the fossil record*. Master Books, 1985.

¹⁰⁹ Ruse, 247 citing from an interview with Harold Slusher and Duane T. Gish, 6 Jan. 1981.

¹¹⁰ Ruse, 247

¹¹¹ Ruse, 247 from interview with Duane T. Gish, 26 Oct. 1980

¹¹² Ruse, 247

an already supportive base.¹¹³ In a 1982 nationwide Gallup poll, nearly 44% of Americans believed in “a recent special creation”, 38% believed in theistic evolution and 9% believed in nontheistic evolution.¹¹⁴ By comparing these figures to a 1963 poll, in which nearly 30% of California church members opposed evolution, it can be surmised that creationism gained traction over these two decades, presumably sparked by Whitcomb and Morris.¹¹⁵

The creationism revival saw much international fruit, particularly among creation scientists in Australia and New Zealand. Australian physician Carl Wieland organized the Creation Science Association, modeled after the CRS and ICR, in 1977.¹¹⁶ Their vow was to present “the very substantial scientific case for creation”, which they began to do in the publication of the magazine, *Ex Nihilo*” in 1978.¹¹⁷ Australian creation science made its way to America in the man Ken Ham, an engaging public speaker and biology teacher, who joined the ICR staff.¹¹⁸

Ken Ham became the face of the next generation of scientific creationists, into the present day.¹¹⁹ Alongside colleagues Mark Looy and Mike Zovath, he founded Answers in Genesis (AiG) in 1994. Ham is a militant advocate of young earth creationism and flood-geology, believing that the Genesis narrative should be

¹¹³ Ruse, 248

¹¹⁴ Ruse, 248 from “Poll Finds Americans Split on Creation Idea.” *New York Times*, August 29, 1982.

¹¹⁵ Ruse, 248

¹¹⁶ Numbers, 332

¹¹⁷ Numbers, 332 citing from *Ex Nihilo* 1 (June 1978): 1-5; Ham, Ken, and Carl Wieland. “Your appendix: It’s there for a reason.” *Creation Ex Nihilo* 20, no. 1 (1997): 41-43.

¹¹⁸ Numbers, 332; Ham, Ken, Andrew Snelling, and Carl Wieland. *The answers book: detailed answers at layman's level to 12 of the most asked questions on creation/evolution*. Answers in Genesis, 1991.

¹¹⁹ For a more detailed treatment of Ken Ham, see Stephens, Randall J., and Karl Giberson. *The anointed: evangelical truth in a secular age*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

read as authoritatively literal and true and that it provides a flawless explanation of the relevant scientific data concerning origins.¹²⁰ In May 2007, he opened the Answers in Genesis Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, an enormous, \$27 million project. Ham has received much public attention, appearing in Bill Maher's mockumentary *Religulous* in 2008.¹²¹ Ham's biggest public appearance came in a February 2014 debate hosted at the Creation Museum between himself and science-educator Bill Nye ("Bill Nye the Science Guy").¹²² Despite being widely discredited by the scientific community, Ken Ham's message has been embraced by millions of followers, and his Creation Museum was visited by more than 250,000 in its first six months of operation.¹²³

The fundamentalists-creationists alliance stood strong against the rising tide of naturalism attacking the evangelical community, but this alliance was a shaky one at best. Having lost the battle for equal treatment in public schools in 1982, progressive creationists and other more moderate anti-evolution movements receded to the background even as young-earth creationism was imbued with renewed vitality. Led by Ken Ham, the successor of Henry Morris, the young-earth creationists seemed to only become more convinced of the truth of their claims the more that natural scientists disregarded them as pseudo-scientific. Tensions between the more moderate anti-Darwinists and the more radical young-earth creationists would begin to emerge in the 1990s, particularly in denominations

¹²⁰ Stephens, Giberson, 11

¹²¹ Maher, B., J. Smith, P. West, and L. Charles. "Religulous [Motion picture]." (2006).

¹²² Nye, Bill. *Undeniable: evolution and the science of creation*. Macmillan, 2014. and Ham, Ken. "Evolution: The Lie." (1987).

¹²³ Stephens, Giberson, 11

where large numbers of both coexisted. Just such a denomination would form in 1973, the Presbyterian Church in America, and it became a case study in the interactions of the competing models for anti-Darwinism.

CHAPTER II: THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA: STIRRINGS AND FORMATION

The formation of the PCA in 1973 was a result of several related influences that frustrated the more conservative members of the Presbyterian Church United States (PCUS). Members of the PCUS seceded and formed the PCA because of antagonism towards racial integration and the PCUS emphasis on funding and supporting civil rights efforts. Coupled with this struggle was a broader continuance of the decades old Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.¹²⁴ Higher criticism of the Bible was pervasive among liberals in the PCUS, and conservatives perceived that the civil rights movement, framed as the Social Gospel, had begun to take on a larger importance perhaps than the propagation of the Gospel itself.¹²⁵ Such higher criticism left no portion of the Bible safe from scrutiny, and the Book of Genesis was the easiest to target. Some of the conservatives who left the PCUS to form the PCA highly favored six-day creationism, and for them the PCUS affirmation of theistic evolution as a valid position in 1969 was a disturbing development. However, issues other than young-earth creationism were of primary concern among those who left the PCUS to escape its liberalism, and this omission of distinction on acceptable anti-Darwinian viewpoints would only postpone the argument.

¹²⁴ Alvis, 47; see also Bradley Longfield's *"For church and country: The fundamentalist-modernist conflict in the Presbyterian Church."* for a more complete discussion of the controversy

¹²⁵ Alvis, 48; see also Petersen, David. "Southern Presbyterian Conservatives and Ecclesiastical Division: The Formation of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1926-1973." (2009).

The height of racial turmoil for the church and for the nation itself unfolded in the turbulent decade of the 1960s. As a whole, the PCUS supported civil rights both financially and organizationally, although there were members of the congregation who believed that too much emphasis was placed on the Social Gospel. In 1964, the General Assembly of the PCUS formed a Fellowship of Concern (FOC), which aimed to start an intra-denominational witness for civil rights.¹²⁶ The FOC operated for four years, contributing money to various areas of racial reconciliation; it disbanded in 1968 under pressures from conservative congregants who viewed it as an interest group.¹²⁷

Iconic civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed the PCUS at the Christian Action Conference at Montreat, North Carolina, in 1965.¹²⁸ Several conservative Southern churches and presbyteries were opposed to King' speaking at this conference, including the Sessions of the First Presbyterian Church of Bainbridge, Georgia, the First (Scots) Presbyterian Church of Charleston, South Carolina, and the Presbyteries in Alabama and South Carolina.¹²⁹ Many of these and other conservative Presbyterians were concerned with King's affiliation with the National Council of Churches (NCC), and there was strong outcry from those insisting that the PCUS withdraw from the NCC – as some opposed to it viewed the

¹²⁶ Alvis, 113; Sanders, Marthame E. "'A Fellowship of Concern' and the Declining Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Presbyterian Church in the United States." *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997-) (1997): 179-195.

¹²⁷ Alvis, 114

¹²⁸ Alvis, Joel L. "The Montreat Conference Center and Presbyterian social policy." *American Presbyterians* (1996): 131-139.

¹²⁹ Alvis, 114

NCC as a communist organization.¹³⁰ Letters to the editor submitted to the church's official publication, the *Presbyterian Survey*, charged it with becoming "a publication of integration, not inspiration" and being "slanted in favor of integration".¹³¹ To some congregants, there seemed to be a growing connection between the ecumenical movement in the United States and civil rights; affiliation with the National Council of Churches meant compromise of doctrinal dogma in favor of ecumenism. The ecumenical movement sought to bring unity to all the disparate parts of the church, both nationwide and throughout Christendom. A growing number of conservative congregants would not stand for this shift and called for the denomination to withdraw its membership from the NCC.¹³² Hugh J. Harper of Birmingham protested in the *Presbyterian Survey*, "the mission of the church is saving men's souls" which could not be accomplished "by the NAACP, CORE, NCC, or UN programs".¹³³

Perhaps the most disturbing development to the conservative Presbyterians within the PCUS was the 1969 General Assembly authorization of the initiation of talks for reunion with UPCUSA (the two denominations would eventually reunite in 1983, forming the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)).¹³⁴ Opposition to this reunion had

¹³⁰ See Jill K. Gill's "Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left." (2011) and Findlay, James F. *Church People in the Struggle: the National Council of Churches and the Black freedom movement, 1950-1970*. Oxford University Press, 1997. for a more complete discussion of the NCC and the ecumenical movement

¹³¹ Alvis, 116, citing H.L. Duke in *Presbyterian Survey* 54, no. 8 (June 1964). and Mrs. James H. Townsend in *Presbyterian Survey* 54, no. 8 (August 1964).

¹³² Alvis, 117

¹³³ Alvis, 118, citing *Presbyterian Survey* 54, (July 1964): 6; (September 1964); 8; and (October 1964): 6-7

¹³⁴ Alvis, 132 referencing Keyes, Kenneth. "Interview with Kenneth Keyes." *Presbyterian Survey* 59 (November 1969): 6-8.

been strong among conservatives in the denomination, especially Southern Presbyterians who felt that “radicals, determined ecumenists, have a timetable for the liquidation of the historic witness of the PCUS”.¹³⁵ After inadequate attempts to heal the growing rift between conservatives and liberals, a discontent group of Presbyterians formed The National Presbyterian Church in America on December 4, 1972, at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Leaders of this new denominational effort, which soon came to be known as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) stressed separation as a necessity on account of the PCUS abandoning the Reformed creeds for human logic and reason.¹³⁶

Historical continuity with the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America is apparent in light of the undertones of resistance to integration as part of church policy. The PCA formed exactly 112 years to date from the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (which formed in 1861). James Henley Thornwell led the charge for the formation of that church in an *Address to all the Churches in Jesus Christ throughout the Earth*¹³⁷, and the PCA commissioners titled their injunction *A Message to All the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World*.¹³⁸ Not only was the title of their charge a play on the title of the 1861 *Message*, but also several of the same justifications and issues

¹³⁵ Alvis, 132 quoting W. Jack Williamson from *Presbyterian Survey* 60 (September 1970): 8

¹³⁶ Alvis, 133; see also Nutt, Rick. "The Tie that no longer binds: The Origins of the Presbyterian Church in America." *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology* (1990): 236-56. and Smith, Frank Joseph. *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Silver Anniversary Edition*. Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999.

¹³⁷ This address is featured in Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America : with an appendix; Columbia [S.C.]: Steam-Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1864.

¹³⁸ This message can be found on the PCA Historical Center website <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/message.html>.

were addressed. At the very least, the founders of the PCA were inspired in their secession from the national denomination by their Confederate predecessors, and at most they were attempting to forge a particularly Southern identity with the formation of the PCA.¹³⁹

Two matters mentioned in the founding documents of the PCA include church governance and the authority of Scripture. The 1972 assembly in Birmingham was not attempting to answer any one specific question; rather, it addressed the perceived gradual “change in the Presbyterian Church in the United States”.¹⁴⁰ Pressure to join in the ecumenical movement threatened the denominational autonomy to practice church governance as the new PCA founders saw fit.¹⁴¹ The PCA separatists sought to maintain autonomy within the denomination rather than be influenced by organizations external to the denomination.¹⁴² In order to stay in an organization such as the National Council of Churches, the PCUS would be expected to adhere to certain agreements common to churches within the NCC. Those in the PCA wanted to be unhindered by arrangements and attachments of extra-denominational organizations.

Historian Joel Alvis claims that “the fundamentalists’ worldview often was not challenged by segregation”, and that the Presbyterian fundamentalists even found Biblical justification for segregation in the Biblical segregation of Israel from

¹³⁹ Lucas, Sean Michael. "Old times there are not forgotten: Robert Lewis Dabney's public theology for a reconstructed South." *Journal of Presbyterian history* 81, no. 3 (2003): 163-177.

¹⁴⁰ Alvis, 134, citing "National Presbyterian Church in America." *Minutes of the First General Assembly* 1 (1973): 40-42. [hereafter NPC, *Mins.*]

¹⁴¹ Alvis, 134

¹⁴² Alvis, 134

the Canaanites.¹⁴³ PCA founding father Morton Smith wrote in 1973, "it is debatable as to whether the Church should get into the matter of trying to change that particular pattern, and branding one form of culture as sinful as opposed to another," an argument that sounded eerily similar to Thornwell's defense of slavery in the 1861 *Address*.¹⁴⁴ To these men, because the Bible did not explicitly condemn segregation, just as it did not explicitly condemn slavery, the Church had no business in deciding or influencing such social issues. In answer to the question of whether or not slavery is a sin, the *Address* made it clear that "the church knows nothing of the intuitions of reason, or the deductions of philosophy, except those reproduced in the sacred canons... we have no right, as a church, to enjoin it as a duty or condemn it as a sin".¹⁴⁵ Just as the 1861 secessionists saw pertinent social issues as outside of the realm of responsibility for the church, the 1973 secessionists would not take a congregational stance on segregation as the PCUS had. Autonomy in church governance and an affirmation of Biblical inerrancy were paramount.

The separatists of 1973 were increasingly frustrated with the higher criticism and new scholarship that emerged after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.¹⁴⁶ They feared that the true Christian faith would be diluted if it was examined under the light of new scholarship and the critical method, an argument

¹⁴³ Alvis, 136; see also Gillespie, G. T. "Defense of the Principle of Racial Segregation." *The Presbyterian Outlook* 137 (1955): 5-9.

¹⁴⁴ Alvis, 136, citing Smith in Smith, Morton H. "How is the Gold Become Dim." *Presbyterian Outlook* 156, no. 3 (July 8, 1974): 210.; see Morton H. Smith's *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* for a more complete discussion of Thornwell's theology

¹⁴⁵ Smith, 39, citing *Minutes, C.S.A.*, 1861, pp. 51-60

¹⁴⁶ Alvis, 134; See also John C. Greene's *Darwin and the Modern Worldview* for a more complete discussion of Darwin's influence on Modernism and Higher Criticism

made earlier in the OPC separation movement of Machen.¹⁴⁷ In fact, General Assemblies of the Southern Presbyterian Church declared on four separate occasions (1886, 1888, 1889, 1924) that theistic evolution was “out of accord with Scripture and the *Confession*”, but this position was renounced by the PCUS in 1969.¹⁴⁸ This modern critical method had been put on trial at the Scopes “Monkey Trial” in 1925. Despite much ridicule being born from the Scopes Trial, the Christian anti-evolution subculture was not extinguished from holding fundamental views.¹⁴⁹ Instead, it seemed that the fundamentalist-creationist culture only became more entrenched in its orthodoxy against outside attacks.¹⁵⁰

Issues of civil rights were tied inseparably to the discontent over the dilution of the denomination that led to the formation of the PCA. Civil rights activism helped to delineate liberal and conservative theology and ideology within the PCUS, as well as demarcate those seeking union with the UPCUSA and those opposed. Leaders on both sides criticized one another on various issues of race relations and human rights, structuring of church programs, and denominational politics.¹⁵¹ The ongoing Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy over the proper interpretation of Scripture and the role of the church in the world found a battleground in the proper response of the Presbyterian Church to issues of civil rights. The founders of the PCA and those who followed in the rift chose to distance themselves from the political and

¹⁴⁷ Alvis, 136 referencing NPC Mins., 1973, pp. 27-29

¹⁴⁸ Creation Study Committee (7) referencing the Digest of Acts and Proceedings of the 1924 General Assembly, p. 6-8

¹⁴⁹ See Edward Larson’s *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* for a more complete discussion of the negative effects of the Scopes Trial on Fundamentalism

¹⁵⁰ Alvis, 136

¹⁵¹ Alvis, 137

social battle surrounding integration by withdrawing from a politically and socially active denomination. Instead, they emphasized a more literal interpretation of Scripture while narrowing the scope of the church's rightful spheres of influence.

This systematic, methodical approach to dividing the Word of God carried with it hermeneutical implications that lend themselves to a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis. While a literal interpretation of Scripture can manifest itself in a belief in six-day creation, this belief is not a necessity for someone who professes to uphold the inerrancy of the Bible as God's Word. A diversity of views remained in the newly formed denomination on the issue, but gradually militant young-earth creationists attempted to frame non-six-day creationists as belonging in the same camp as the liberals from which the denomination had just succeeded. This constant attempt to narrow the scope of what can be defined as orthodox is aptly demonstrated in the legacy of separation left by J. Gresham Machen.

In a 2003 article by John M. Frame, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary titled *Machen's Warrior Children*, Dr. Frame discussed at length the legacy left by J. Gresham Machen and Westminster Theological Seminary on American evangelicals within the Reformed tradition.¹⁵² Machen was influenced by the inductive methods of Francis Bacon, who began his methodology with established "facts" that could be drawn out to more general statements through the process of induction. Facts about God, humanity, and nature could be found in the Bible, and once found, became indisputable. These facts were

¹⁵² Frame, John M. "Machen's Warrior Children." *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology: A Dynamic Engagement* (2004): 113-46.

then moved into the realm of infallible, and finally to the realm of inerrant. According to this inductive reasoning, facts found in the Bible were both without fault and without error, and to dispute them would be logically inconsistent.¹⁵³ When confronted with the choice of either compromising on inerrant truth or seceding to form a new denomination, the correct choice was secession.

Machen's methodology greatly influenced all elements of Reformed Christianity, and Frame argues that his movement "provided [the] theological leadership" for Reformed Christians seeking to uphold the Reformation principle of *semper reformada* (that is, the church is always to be reformed).¹⁵⁴ Frame goes as far as to claim "although Machen's Westminster was not a large seminary, it was one of the most important influences, perhaps the most important institutional influence, upon conservative Reformed theology in the twentieth century".¹⁵⁵ One indication of this influence can be found in the formation of Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), founded in Jackson Mississippi in 1966, which now has three campuses and numerous extension centers. RTS "readily acknowledges a large debt to Westminster, in curriculum, theological emphasis, and faculty".¹⁵⁶ Many of the founders of the PCA were either educated at RTS or owed their theological dispositions to the teachings of RTS.

The danger of Machen's principle of secession presented itself in deciding what comprises an inerrant truth that has been compromised. In fact, some

¹⁵³ Alvis, 136; see also Perry, John. "Dissolving the inerrancy debate: how modern philosophy shaped the evangelical view of Scripture." *Quodlibet Journal* 3, no. 4 (2001).

¹⁵⁴ Frame, 3; see also Horton, Michael. "Semper reformanda." *Tabletalk Magazine* 1 (2009).

¹⁵⁵ Frame, 4

¹⁵⁶ Frame, 4

followers of the movement have misrepresented it, ignoring Machen's tradition of deliberately encouraging theological diversity.¹⁵⁷ Frame draws the connection between the 1973 secession and the future accusations that some within the denomination were liberal in this way: "Machen's children were theological battlers, and, when the battle against liberalism in the PCUSA appeared to be over, they found theological battles to fight".¹⁵⁸ Frame asserts that the Machen movement "was born in controversy over liberal theology", but once the Machenites had found a common identity within a truly Reformed Presbyterian church, "they were unable to moderate their martial impulses".¹⁵⁹ Without an explicitly liberal theology to combat, they engaged in infighting.¹⁶⁰ These battles have continued into the present, and the fight over the extent and duration of the creation days represents just one manifestation of many such theological battles within the PCA.¹⁶¹

Having divorced the denomination from liberal theology and higher criticism, the PCA hoped to maintain doctrinal purity. Other Presbyterian denominations had already seceded from the mainline denomination before 1973, and a denominational merger would occur in the next decade that brought about a broadening of what could be deemed orthodox in the PCA. The extent and duration of the creation days would become a source of controversy that served as a microcosm for the ongoing struggle of the PCA to find a conservative identity that sufficiently shielded itself from the future encroachment of liberalism.

¹⁵⁷ Frame, 3

¹⁵⁸ Frame, 4-5

¹⁵⁹ Frame, 26

¹⁶⁰ Frame, 26

¹⁶¹ Frame, 4-5

CHAPTER III: A TEST OF ORTHODOXY

The newly formed PCA was an autonomous denomination held only to the standards of the inerrancy of Scripture and the tenants of the Westminster Standards, and they enjoyed relative ideological purity for a time. This new denomination had a particularly Southern identity, as evidenced by the influence of such luminaries as James Henley Thornwell and Robert Lewis Dabney (both strong adherents of a literal six-day creation) on the PCA's founders. However, another merger occurred in 1982 that changed the dynamic of the situation, moving the denomination away from its Southern identity into a more national manifestation. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, merged with the Presbyterian Church in America in 1982 in an action known as the "joining and receiving"¹⁶², bringing with it the RPCES seminary Covenant Theological Seminary. This seminary was founded in 1956 in St. Louis, Missouri, along with an accompanying liberal arts college known as Covenant College. The seminary and college were initially founded by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (which later merged with the Reformed Presbyterian Church) on principles of strong conservative theological opposition to rising liberal influences within the

¹⁶² *Documents of Synod: Study Papers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (1965 to 1982)*. PCA Historical Center. <http://pcahistory.org/findingaids/rpces/docsynod/476.html>.

denomination.¹⁶³ In 1964, the undergraduate school moved to Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and formally divided from Covenant Theological Seminary in 1966.¹⁶⁴ With the 1982 merger of the RPCES and the PCA, Covenant Theological Seminary became the national seminary of the denomination. The denomination oversees its work and elects its Board of Trustees.¹⁶⁵ The seminary professes to adhere to the Reformed Creeds, Covenant Theology, and the inerrant and inspired word of God¹⁶⁶; regardless, accusations of liberalism were leveled at the seminary during the 1990s due to expansive views on the creation days.

The 1982 merger and transition to an official denominational seminary was not a wholly smooth one, as Presbyterians have historically struggled with the idea of church unity.¹⁶⁷ Frame suggests that Reformed thinkers favor pluriformity, the notion that denominations are a good thing.¹⁶⁸ The debate over pluriformity is two-sided. Some view denominations as a God ordained means of dealing with theological differences of opinion, while others view it as a disruption of the peace and purity of the Body of Christ. Pluriformity gained popularity in the late twentieth century, and while the RCPES joined and was received by the PCA in 1982, the PCA General Assembly turned down an application for merger by the OPC (the denomination of Machen) in 1986 that would have further broadened the PCA.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Clarke, Sathianathan. "Harriet A. Harris, Fundamentalism and Evangelicals (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xiv+ 384.£ 25.00 (pbk)." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, no. 02 (2012): 249-251. (p. 260)

¹⁶⁴ William F. Hull, *Lookout Mountain*, Arcadia Publishing, 2009, (p. 94)

¹⁶⁵ Nutt, 236-256

¹⁶⁶ Covenant Theological Seminary. <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/why-covenant/>.

¹⁶⁷ Hart, D. G. "After the Breakup, Heartbreak: Conservative Presbyterians without a Common Foe." *Journal of Presbyterian History* 1 (2008): 61.

¹⁶⁸ Frame, 22

¹⁶⁹ Frame, 22

Frame traces a historical tendency of Reformed churches to be hesitant at the notion of unity, opting instead to be needlessly divisive.¹⁷⁰ He comments, “Reformed churches tend to glory in their distinctives: their history, their ethnic origins, the theological battles of the past that have made them different from others”.¹⁷¹

A notable proof of this principle of divisiveness can be found in the cool reception of Covenant Theological Seminary as the national seminary of the PCA. In a 2015 interview with Sam Duncan, an attorney from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and influential elder from First Presbyterian Church Hattiesburg (PCA), Duncan opined that Covenant Theological Seminary was responsible for much of the current liberalizing of the congregation on the issue of the length and extent of the creation days.¹⁷² Duncan recalled that the creation issue started with a general murmuring among the presbyteries about some of the teachers and teachings at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Duncan’s home presbytery, Grace Presbytery in southern Mississippi, was particularly disgruntled over the apparent liberal influence seeping into the denomination. Some seminary professors at Covenant Seminary were expansive on their views on the length of the days of Creation. For many conservatives, where a pastor fell on the spectrum of views on the length of the Creation days was thought to be “the latest, greatest test of ones orthodoxy in the PCA”.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Frame, 22

¹⁷¹ Frame, 22

¹⁷² Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

¹⁷³ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

Some PCA presbyteries were discontent with expansive views on the days of creation being taught at Covenant Seminary, a likely indicator of continued wariness of the 1982 joining and receiving. This particular difference of opinion amounted to a test of fellowship, and the conservative thinkers within the denomination were determined to not let the issue rest until the denomination came into agreement.¹⁷⁴ At stake were which disagreements constitute true tests of orthodoxy, and which disagreements should be tolerated within the church.¹⁷⁵ Frame argues that, “the Machen movement thought little about the difference between tolerable and intolerable disagreements in the church”.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, a resistance movement to encroaching liberal influences was growing among certain Presbyterian teaching and ruling elders.

In December 1992, the organization Concerned Presbyterians was founded by several elders who were discontent with Covenant Theological Seminary and the general liberalizing of the PCA. Chairman Rev. Charles L. Wilson lamented in the first *Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* publication of 1996 that, “many people in the PCA had been led astray by a group of ‘Modernists’ using the false name of ‘Evangelicals’”.¹⁷⁷ Among a list of other areas of concerns for the Concerned Presbyterians was a straying away from “the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture” and a particular amendment to the PCA *Book of Church Order* “which delegates all judicial cases to a Standing Judicial Commission, without any right reserved to the

¹⁷⁴ Frame, 27

¹⁷⁵ Frame, 27-28

¹⁷⁶ Frame, 27

¹⁷⁷ Wilson, Charles. “Origins of Concerned Presbyterians.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 1

Assembly to question or debate the decisions of this Commission”.¹⁷⁸ Clearly, these two issues are reminiscent of the very issues that led to the formation of the PCA, namely autonomy in church governance and an affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture. This was not lost on Rev. Wilson, who wrote in a December 1996 newsletter of *The Concerned Presbyterian* expressing alarm at a 24th General Assembly committee review of Presbytery records which found that “several Presbyteries... are receiving men who deny six day creation”.¹⁷⁹ He saw this as a “movement among some PCA Churches to discard the doctrinal beliefs that the Holy Bible is the word of God and the only infallible guide for faith and practice”.¹⁸⁰ In an April 1997 article of the newsletter, Rev. Wilson expressed concern that history was repeating itself as the PCA moved “away from its Biblical moorings”.¹⁸¹ He lamented further “many Presbyteries receive men who do not believe in literal 6-day

¹⁷⁸ Wilson, Charles. “Origins of Concerned Presbyterians.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 2

¹⁷⁹ Wilson, Charles. “An Open Letter to the PCA.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 1, no. 4 (December 1996): 1

¹⁸⁰ Wilson, Charles. “An Open Letter to the PCA.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 1, no. 4 (December 1996): 1

¹⁸¹ Wilson, Charles. “Is History Repeating Itself.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (April 1997): 1-2

Creation”.¹⁸² These men “interpret Scriptures by our culture rather than interpreting Scripture by Scripture”, and he assured his readers that the PCA would soon become like the PCUS at the time of the split: “more concerned with political, social and economic issues than with Scriptural issues”.¹⁸³

A looming cloud of non-literal views of the Genesis account had descended on the denomination, and tracking *The Concerned Presbyterian* newsletter publications offers a unique view into the frustrations of the ultra-conservative within the PCA. This watchdog publication sounded the first alarm with the handling of Report of the Committee for the Review of Presbytery Records at the 25th General Assembly, held in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Rev. E.C. Case of First Presbyterian Church, Woodville, raised concern that in the course of the debate over a James River Presbytery’s licensure of a candidate who took a “poetic view” of the account of the first chapter of Genesis, evidence was present that suggested widespread support in the General Assembly for the notion that “non-literal views of the creation account in Genesis are perfectly acceptable and should not be considered as exceptions to our Standard”.¹⁸⁴ According to Rev. Case, “the non-literal view of the Genesis account is a cancer which will grow and metastasize and eventually destroy this denomination”.¹⁸⁵

Covenant Theological Seminary Professor of Old Testament Jack Collins was particularly culpable in teaching divergent views on the creation days, and Sam

¹⁸² Wilson, Charles. “Is History Repeating Itself.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (April 1997): 1-2

¹⁸³ Wilson, Charles. “Is History Repeating Itself.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (April 1997): 1-2

¹⁸⁴ Case, E.C. “Editorial.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 3 (July 1997): 1-4

¹⁸⁵ Case, E.C. “Editorial.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 3 (July 1997): 1-4

Duncan attributes much of the controversy to his teachings. "I think most of it goes back to the Old Testament teacher Jack Collins who is the professor there at Covenant Seminary... he is a really sharp guy".¹⁸⁶ In order to understand the Creation Days controversy in the PCA, it is essential to understand C. John Collins. Collins has served as Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary since 1993, but his journey with the reconciliation of science and faith began long before his position with the seminary. Collins received a B.S. and an M.S. in Computer Science and Systems Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1978. Both he and his wife boast two degrees from MIT, and Collins spoke on their science and engineering background in a 2015 interview. "We think very highly of science in our household, but we also know how science works. Just because the scientists say it doesn't mean its true. I think we have a lot of respect and we know how to properly evaluate scientific pronouncement".¹⁸⁷ After heeding a call to ministry, Collins moved to Tacoma, Washington, to attend the Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, where he received his MDiv in 1985.¹⁸⁸ Upon receiving his PhD in Hebrew Language from the University of Liverpool School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies in 1989, he returned to Spokane to plant Faith Presbyterian Church in Spokane from 1989-1992.¹⁸⁹ From there, he departed to

¹⁸⁶ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Collins, C. J. "Dr. C. John "Jack" Collins Curriculum Vitae." Covenant Theological Seminary. <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CV-Dr-Jack-Collins.pdf>.

¹⁸⁹ Collins, C. J. "Dr. C. John "Jack" Collins Curriculum Vitae." Covenant Theological Seminary. <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CV-Dr-Jack-Collins.pdf>.

take up the role of Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, where he has served as the Department Chair since 2005.¹⁹⁰

Collins claims that during the 1980s, he had not really thought much about the reconciliation of science and religion; rather, he was more concerned with exegetical, grammatical issues in the first few chapters in Genesis.¹⁹¹ While a doctoral student in England in the late 80s, he attended a church where the pastor was an avid Young-Earth Creationist. Collins claims this pastor was “actually the [current] English representative of Answers in Genesis. A very good friend. He made various points, but I was always non-committal on the subject”.¹⁹² The breakthrough to Collins’ current view did not occur until July 1987 when he listened to a paper at Tyndale House in Cambridge, Leslie McFall’s *The Anthropomorphic Case for Creation*, which argued that Augustine’s approach to the Creation Days was anthropomorphic.¹⁹³ According to Collins, the creation days’ account is full of anthropomorphisms, attributing human characteristics and emotions to God, in order for the reader to better understand the narrative. The six days of creation were not literal solar days, just as God did not literally need to rest (fatigue is a human condition) on the seventh day. “That was the thing that got me thinking more

¹⁹⁰ Collins, C. J. "Dr. C. John "Jack" Collins Curriculum Vitae." Covenant Theological Seminary. <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CV-Dr-Jack-Collins.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

¹⁹² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

¹⁹³ February 1, 2016 email correspondence with Jack Collins

seriously, over the course of the next several years off and on I was thinking about it some more".¹⁹⁴

He was finally prompted to write an article in 1994 for his seminary journal that he claims "aroused the interest of some of the intelligent design folks".¹⁹⁵

Collins' interest in working through the exegetical issues of Genesis had been ignited by this journalistic foray, and he set out to "figure out how Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 could live together and not be contradictory".¹⁹⁶ His self-proclaimed breakthrough came five years later, and the insight was published in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.¹⁹⁷ Collins admits that all along, the reconciliation of linguistic and exegetical issues, rather than issues of scientific and Biblical reconciliation, has been the purpose of his work. "That has been my motivation, how do you resolve these tensions in the Hebrew text".¹⁹⁸ Having begun his own personal journey down the

¹⁹⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

¹⁹⁵ Collins, C. J. "How Old is the Earth? Anthropomorphic Days in Genesis 1:1-2:3." *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 109-30. Collins, Jack. Interview by author. A critique is offered by Jordan, James B. "9-8: The Anthropomorphic Days of C. John Collins, Part 1." *Biblical Horizons*. <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-chronology/9-8-the-anthropomorphic-days-of-c-john-collins-part-1/>. See also Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015. For commentary on this work, see Christian, Any. "Pre-Programmed Descent with Modification: Functional Integrity, Intelligent Design, and Natural History." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 52 (2000): 98-107. as well as Numbers, Ronald L. "CREATING CREATIONISM: MEANINGS AND USAGE SINCE THE AGE OF AGASSIZ, PART."

¹⁹⁶ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

¹⁹⁷ Collins, C. J. "Discourse Analysis and the Interpretation of Genesis 2:4-7." *Westminster Theological Journal* 61, no. 2 (1999): 269-76. for commentary on this work see Gudbergson, Thomas. "The Unity of Gen 2, 4." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24, no. 2 (2010): 235-252. and Patterson, Todd. "The Righteousness and Survival of the Seed: The Role of Plot in the Exegesis and Theology of Genesis." PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2012. and Futato, Mark D. "Reformed Theological Seminary OT 508 Fall 2005." (2005).

¹⁹⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015.

path of reconciling the Genesis text, he was primed for the completion of his journey when the denomination began to take this issue seriously.

Collins' mention of his work arousing the interest of the intelligent design community places the controversy within the PCA in the broader historical context. The entire episode of the PCA creation days controversy can be framed in the larger context of anti-Darwinism within America at the time. After the failure of scientific creationism to gain national scientific legitimacy under John C. Whitcomb and Henry Morris, those who still held to scientific creationism viewed this as an ultimate test of holding fast to God's Word in the midst of persecution and ridicule. Those Christians who did not hold to scientific creationism were labeled as liberal, unorthodox, and not serious about upholding the Word of God against the attacks of modern science and naturalism. Meanwhile, the more scientifically minded anti-Darwinism front found an ally in the Intelligent Design movement.¹⁹⁹

Intelligent Design began as a movement among Christian intellectuals in the 1980s and saw its first fruit with the 1993 publication of *Darwin on Trial*, authored by University of California law professor Phillip Johnson.²⁰⁰ Johnson's approach was not blatantly fundamental, as he avoids proposing an identity for the intelligent designer. It is not necessary that the designer be the God of the Bible, though his own religious affiliation betrays the identity of the proposed designer. A critique of his work is that it focuses more on the consequences of accepting evolutionary

¹⁹⁹ Pennock, Robert T. *Intelligent design creationism and its critics: Philosophical, theological, and scientific perspectives*. No. 98. MIT Press, 2001.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, Phillip E. "Darwin on trial." (1993).

theory than on the truth of the theory itself.²⁰¹ Despite an unenthusiastic reception from the scientific community, Johnson pressed forward with establishing The Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute, a conservative think tank, in 1996. The Center quickly grew, and by 1999 it employed 45 fellows and had an operating budget of \$750,000.²⁰² At the same time as the founding of the Center, biochemist Michael Behe published *Darwin's Black Box* in 1996.²⁰³ This work introduced the concept of irreducible complexity, the idea that certain biochemical structures are too complex to have originated through random variance. Mathematician and philosopher William Dembski further proposed a theory of specified complexity to demonstrate that complex life forms could never have arisen through naturalistic evolution apart from an intelligent designer.²⁰⁴ Phillip Johnson remains the figurehead of the movement, and Behe and Dembski provide the intellectual credibility that the anti-Darwinian movement so desperately craves.

Not only did Intelligent Design boast a strong cast, it also had a clear vision. Operating under the "Wedge Strategy", the Discovery Institute intended to publish 30 books and 100 scientific or technical papers within 5-year periods.²⁰⁵ The goal of the Wedge Strategy was to break the monopoly of naturalism on science, with a clear emphasis on injecting Intelligent Design into public school curricula as an

²⁰¹ Young M, Edis T. Why intelligent design fails: A scientific critique of the new creationism. Rutgers University Press; 2006. 3

²⁰² Young M, Edis T. 3

²⁰³ Behe, Michael J. *Darwin's black box: The biochemical challenge to evolution*. Simon and Schuster, 1996.

²⁰⁴ Dembski, William A. *The design inference: Eliminating chance through small probabilities*. Cambridge University Press, 1998. and Dembski, William A. *Intelligent design: The bridge between science & theology*. InterVarsity Press, 2002.

²⁰⁵ Johnson, Phillip E. "The wedge of truth." *Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism*. Downers Grove, InterVarsity (2000).

alternative to evolution.²⁰⁶ Despite its lack of an explicitly religious agenda, veiling the God of the Bible as simply an Intelligent Designer, the Intelligent Design community has been labeled as “neocreationism”.²⁰⁷ Philosopher Barbara Forrest has called the movement “Creationism’s Trojan Horse”, reminding her readers that science cannot appeal to supernatural explanations “because there is neither a methodology for testing them nor an epistemology for knowing the supernatural. Science has a naturalistic methodology, known less controversially as ‘scientific method’”.²⁰⁸ Even so, the Intelligent Design community admits to the age of the earth and agrees to certain premises of evolution, such as descent with modification. These concessions to mainstream science make Intelligent Design an attractive alternative to the highly controversial scientific creationism of Whitcomb, Morris, and Ham.

Speaking on the situation within the seminary, Collins asserts that most of his students are very thoughtful in their attempts to grapple with the issue. Some of them retain their young earth creationism, but Dr. Collins insists that they be fair in their assessment. “If they are going to give a critique of a view that they don’t hold, [I insist] that they represent it fairly and honestly – represent it in its best light”.²⁰⁹ Collins believes that most of his students come from backgrounds where the issue is

²⁰⁶ Young M, Edis T. 3

²⁰⁷ Young M, Edis T. 1

²⁰⁸ Forrest, Barbara, and Paul R. Gross. *Creationism's Trojan horse: The wedge of intelligent design*. Oxford University Press, 2007. quote taken from interview "Intelligent Design: Creationism's Trojan Horse - A Conversation With Barbara Forrest." *Church & State* (January 2005): 9-11. <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=15979285&S=R&D=f5h&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHX8kSep7A4y9fwOLCmr06ep7JJsau4TLeWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMOvX5Yavqa9luePfgeyx43zx>.

²⁰⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015.

not hugely important, so there is not great pressure to hold to a certain position or another. Within the faculty itself, there have been conversations on the issue but an atmosphere of respect has been maintained even when there is disagreement. Collins recalls that in the 90s and early 2000s, his senior colleague Dr. Robert Vasholz was an advocate for the Calendar Day Reading of Genesis 1. “It was important for us to show that we could bear our disagreements and also work together”.²¹⁰ Collins likes to think that his presentation of his view is persuasive, but he has not done a poll of his colleagues to see what the individual view of each faculty member is. “It’s actually not a huge issue with us, so we don’t talk about it very much”.²¹¹

While the creation days issue was not a source of intra-seminary controversy, animosity towards Covenant Theological Seminary and all non-literal views of Genesis 1-3 were at an all-time high around the time of Collins’ breakout publications. He recalls this tension well: “there was controversy roiling during most of the 90s over ‘do we have just one view allowed, and that’s the confessional view or are we going to have a variety of views allowed in the PCA’?”²¹² Aspiring pastors seeking ordination in the PCA must accept the Bible as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, and they also must accept the Westminster Standards (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Shorter Catechism*, the *Larger Catechism*, and the *Book of Church Order*). If they have particular concern with an aspect of the Westminster Standards on a certain issue, they are required to make

²¹⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015.

²¹¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015.

²¹² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

their exception known to their Presbytery of their own initiative, provided they can justify their exception Biblically to the satisfaction of the presbytery's examining committee.²¹³ A pastor may still be ordained while taking an exception to the Standards, but whether or not he should be allowed to teach his exception is a matter of continuing controversy.²¹⁴ Pastor William Harrell argues that since exceptions are "errant views opposing what our standards have stated as scriptural teaching", they should "not be taught from the pulpit or by other means".²¹⁵ This principle is known as confessional subscription, and as such the PCA is known as a subscriptionist denomination. Frame sees a certain danger in giving the Confessions a nearly unamendable status. "Reformed theology embraces sola Scriptura and therefore must allow practical means by which the Bible can lead us to revise the confessions if need be".²¹⁶ The proper avenue for propagating views errant to the Standards is through the formation of a General Assembly study committee, to be voted upon by the General Assembly itself.

Debatably, the wording of the Westminster Standards open up the door for a broad range of beliefs on what is meant by the duration of a day in the Genesis creation account:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make

²¹³ Gilchrist, Paul R., ed. *Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*. 5th ed. Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education Publications, 1998. (21-5; Question 2)

²¹⁴ Harrell, William. "Should Exceptions to Our Standards Be Preached or Taught in the PCA?" *The Presbyterian Witness* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 36-40.

²¹⁵ Harrell, 40

²¹⁶ Frame, 20

*of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.*²¹⁷

J. Ligon Duncan, current president of Reformed Theological Seminary, suggests that there are three plausible interpretations around what was meant by “in the space of six days”.²¹⁸ First, the Westminster Assembly was intentionally ambiguous in their language as a result of openness to a non-literal interpretation of the creation days. Their indecision was deliberate, being aware of “ancient or contemporary non-literal interpretations of the creation days”.²¹⁹ Second, the Assembly was committed to a literal, six-day, view of creation, and was aware of the various ancient and contemporary non-literal interpretations to the contrary. With these alternative interpretations in mind, they “did not attempt to make any assertion whatsoever about the nature of the creation days in the Confession or Catechisms”.²²⁰

The third option, and the most historically probable according to Duncan, is that the Assembly was either generally or unanimously committed to a literal six day view, and “chose to employ Calvin’s explicitly literalist language (“in the space of six days”) in an effort to promote one particular view of the manner and time-span of creation as over against other views”.²²¹ The debate over the precise meaning of the language employed by the Westminster Divines strikes at the heart of the

²¹⁷ Williamson, Gerald Irvin. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*. Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1964. (Westminster Confession of Faith 4:1)

²¹⁸ Duncan, J L. "Animadversions on Alex Mitchell's View of the Westminster Assembly and the Days of Creation." *The Presbyterian Witness* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 31-35.

²¹⁹ Duncan, 31

²²⁰ Duncan, 31

²²¹ Duncan, 32

creation day controversy, and the Concerned Presbyterians were demanding clarity from Covenant Theological Seminary on the issue.

In a December 1997 meeting of the Covenant Theological Seminary Executive Committee, then president Bryan Chapell defended himself and his seminary against the growing tendency of disgruntled presbyteries to accuse his college of being unorthodox, or perhaps even out and out liberal.²²² Dr. Chapell defended his seminary in the midst of what he saw as the two most pressing issues threatening to divide the church – the Genesis creation account and the interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The creation controversy came as a surprise: “for generations there has been an informed allowance for differences among Bible-believing Presbyterians about how best to interpret these accounts, so long as they were believed to be accurate and historical”.²²³ The climate had changed, however, and combatant elders and presbyteries were asserting that those not holding to literal six-day creationism should not be ordained to minister in the PCA churches.

This was a troubling development for Dr. Chapell, who asserted that “Covenant Seminary has not changed its position on this issue in its 40 years of existence” in a letter to a PCA elder.²²⁴ Boasting conservative credentials, he assured the concerned elder that “no one here endorses evolution... denies God’s creation out of nothing, the historicity of Adam and Eve, the special creation of man, the

²²² Chapell, Bryan. *'98-'99 President's Goals and Report*. N.p.: Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics <http://www.reformed.org/creation/index.html>.

²²³ Chapell

²²⁴ Chapell

reality of the Fall”.²²⁵ A Covenant Seminary professor (presumably Jack Collins) had actually worked closely with author Phillip Johnson, who wrote *Darwin on Trial*, and Michael Behe, who wrote *Darwin’s Black Box*, to launch “one of the most powerful intellectual assaults on Darwinism in the last half century”.²²⁶ Rather than working to pacify those opposed to Covenant Seminary, the alliance between certain professors at Covenant Theological Seminary and leading Intelligent Design authors Phillip Johnson and Michael Behe, as well as Jack Collins’ work with the Discovery Institute, appeared as the ultimate compromise that sounded the alarm for a resurgence of liberal theology more generally.

Dr. Chapell continued his rebuttal against “accusations of liberalism creeping into the seminaries” by assuring the Executive Committee that Covenant Seminary still teaches the theology of all of the “giants in the faith” as it had for the past 40 years.²²⁷ He juxtaposed those theologians, modern and ancient, into the two categories of those who believed in a 144-hour creation and those who did not. The 24-hour day creationists included John Calvin, John Girardeau, Thornwell, Dabney, and Louis Berkhof. Those open to not limiting the Creation to strict 24-hour days included:

ancient church fathers such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas; the puritan, William Ames; the great 19th Century defenders of Presbyterian orthodoxy such as Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, and B.B. Warfield; major 20th Century advocates of Biblical inerrancy such as J. Gresham Machen, J. Oliver Buswell, E.J. Young, Donald Grey Barnhouse, and Francis Schaeffer; and, current men who have taught at each of the

²²⁵ Chapell

²²⁶ Chapell; Johnson, Phillip E., and Michael J. Behe. *Darwin on trial*. InterVarsity Press, 2010.; Behe, Michael J., and Tom Cavalier-Smith. "Darwin's Black Box." *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 12, no. 4 (1997): 162-162.

²²⁷ Chapell

major Reformed seminaries including R. Laird Hays, Meredith Kline, Jack Collins, Willem VanGemeren, Nigel Lee, R.C. Sproul, Morton Smith, and Bruce Waltke.²²⁸

Perhaps the most interesting man on this latter list was Dr. Morton Smith, a founding father of the PCA and respected Southern Presbyterian who stressed that “a man's position on the length of the creation days alone should not keep him from being ordained as a PCA minister”.²²⁹ Smith was perhaps mistakenly put into this latter list. In his early years, while receiving his undergraduate degree in botany from the University of Michigan, he tended towards a non-literal view. However, he has since moved “back to the literal creation account” and holds that the “Westminster Standards must be understood as teaching a six literal day creation”.²³⁰ Any other view falls outside of the purview of the Standards, “an honest subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms requires the acceptance of the position of six literal days”.²³¹ Without interpreting the Standards in this way, the Standards and subscriptionism slip into meaninglessness. “To be allowed to handle the Standards in some way other than that which was intended by the authors is not ethically or morally honest”, and Morton warns that the PCA will soon apply the same principles of confessional interpretation to the much weightier matters of the atonement and the resurrection.²³²

Notwithstanding the case of Morton Smith, that all of these respected men of the faith had “fallen into some form of liberalism... or kept their views under wraps”

²²⁸ Chapell

²²⁹ Smith, Morton H. "My Pilgrimage Regarding Creation." *The Presbyterian Witness* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 18-20.

²³⁰ Smith, 20

²³¹ Smith, 20

²³² Smith, 20

was an accusation that some ultra-conservative Presbyterians were still willing to make.²³³ The liberal witch-hunt had begun, or perhaps had never ceased even with the denominational split, and the “issue of creation days” had become “hot in some PCA presbyteries”.²³⁴ Chapell agreed that “we should have no patience for liberalism”, but was flustered that presbyteries would deny ordination to men who held views “deemed for decades, or centuries, to be legitimate Biblical interpretations that fall within our system of doctrine”.²³⁵ He attributed fear as the leading cause of this push for a test of orthodoxy, and decried that “we ought to be able to recognize that a different perspective on timing does not necessarily mean that a brother has abandoned Scripture or has left the realm of orthodoxy”.²³⁶ The denomination was being divided over issues of “personal preference rather than Biblical principle” in an attempt by some to “establish what (and who) is orthodox among us”.²³⁷ He did not feel that the matter would resolve quickly or quietly, and blamed “those who want to cast fear of ‘liberal drift’ into our people” for using the issue of the creation days “without explaining (or even learning) the complexity of the details and exegesis involved”.²³⁸ At the time of his writing, the PCA General Assembly had already voted twice, both in 1995 and 1997, to not make adoption of

²³³ Chapell

²³⁴ Chapell

²³⁵ Chapell

²³⁶ Chapell

²³⁷ Chapell

²³⁸ Chapell

the 144-hour Creation week a requirement for interpretation of the PCA Standards.²³⁹

Rather than assuage the complaints of his accusers, Dr. Chapell's address only confirmed the suspicions of those who had an ambivalent opinion of Covenant Theological Seminary. Dr. Jack B. Scott was prompted by Chappell's address to write a response calling the address "The Handwriting on the Wall", a reference to the Old Testament feast of Belshazzar in which God numbers the days of the kingdom of Babylon in judgment of Belshazzar's blasphemy against God.²⁴⁰ He begins his response by recalling his horror while a student at Columbia Theological Seminary, a theological seminary of the PCUS, upon hearing his professor assert "no Bible scholar any longer believes that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are history."²⁴¹ Dr. Scott, a PCA teaching elder who signed the December 7, 1972, declaration that brought the PCA into existence, warned that this type of skepticism towards the Bible was reentering the church again on the issue of the days of Genesis 1. Dr. Scott made clear that this issue was not some "new standard of holiness", or even an issue of interpretation, but rather a matter of "standing for what God's Word says".²⁴² To teach anything other than a literal six-day account of Genesis 1 was not a presentation of the Gospel in a different way, but rather amounted to the presentation of "a very different Gospel".²⁴³ Dr. Chapell's assertion that Covenant

²³⁹ Chapell; See Gunn, Grover. "A Response to Dr. Bryan Chapell's '98-'99 President's Goals and Reports." *The Presbyterian Witness* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 27-28. and footnotes for a full explanation of Chapell's claims concerning the 1995 and 1997 decisions of the General Assembly

²⁴⁰ Scott, Jack B. "The Handwriting on the Wall: A Reply to Bryan Chapell's "President's Goals and Report"." *The Presbyterian Witness* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 13-18.

²⁴¹ Scott, 13

²⁴² Scott, 15

²⁴³ Scott, 16

Theological Seminary had not changed its position over the past 40 years was particularly alarming, because this meant that the seminary had “began wrong”.²⁴⁴ Nor was this an issue of little consequence, as it threatened the “integrity of the entire Word of God as the authority for what we are to believe and teach”.²⁴⁵ Dr. Scott concluded by demanding that all teaching elders ordained in the PCA hold to a literal six-day view of the creation account. Those who doubted whether or not this is what God truly meant in Genesis 1-3 were falling for the same question that Satan, in the guise of a serpent, posed to Adam and Eve – “hath God truly said?”²⁴⁶

Others joined in the suspicion. Grover Gunn, a pastor of Carrollton Presbyterian Church in Carrollton, Mississippi, was more generous in framing the controversy as one of an acceptable range of latitude over the interpretation of Genesis 1. However, he did see a dangerous precedent set for pastors to defend their non-literal position by stating that their methodology has taught them “to read the Confession through the lens of Scripture, not to read Scripture through the lens of the Confession (Dr. Chapell’s own words)”.²⁴⁷ This flexibility theoretically allows a minister to apply “this same principle to other issues such as paedocommunion, hyper-preterism, dispensationalism, etc”.²⁴⁸

This relationship between the Confession of the Church and the interpretation of Scripture has great potential for abuse. The greatest fear was that pastors would begin to question the historicity of Genesis 3, wherein God curses

²⁴⁴ Scott, 16

²⁴⁵ Scott, 17

²⁴⁶ Scott, 18

²⁴⁷ Gunn, 22

²⁴⁸ Gunn, 22

man for his sin and death enters the world. Without this death (spiritual and physical), there remains no need for the atonement for sin, and thus no need for a Savior, namely Jesus Christ. Such a degeneration of the Bible strikes at the core of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, and the unease exhibited by these concerned Presbyterian elders was indicative of a return to the same liberal theology that caused the 1973 rift in the first place. Byron Snapp, the editor of *The Presbyterian Witness*, said as much. As an increasing number of men entered the PCA with non-literal views of Genesis 1, it became ever more likely that “the non-literal view can become the dominant position”.²⁴⁹ Before long, “someone holding to a non-literal view of Genesis 3 will desire to enter a PCA presbytery. Just because no one with this view could get into a presbytery now does not mean that the threat will not be a reality in the future”.²⁵⁰ Further narrowing the field, Snapp reminds his readers, “All interpretations of Genesis 1 cannot be correct. In fact, there is but one correct interpretation”.²⁵¹

A real tipping point for the congregation was reached at the 25th General Assembly in June 1997 in Colorado Springs. A particular complaint being heard by the Standing Judicial Committee at this time was Mount Carmel Session vs. New Jersey Presbytery (Case 97-5).²⁵² Mount Carmel Session of the New Jersey Presbytery challenged differing views on the creation days, and attempted to limit

²⁴⁹ Snapp, Byron. "Editor's Introduction." *The Presbyterian Witness* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 4-5.

²⁵⁰ Snapp, 4

²⁵¹ Snapp, 5

²⁵² Minutes of the Twenty-fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1997) (p. 64)

and define what was meant by the phrase of “in the space of six days” as understood in the Westminster Standards.

Recommendations and a majority report on the Mount Carmel case were not made until the 26th General Assembly, held in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1998.²⁵³ The facts were summarized and showed that Mt. Carmel Church Session begun the incident in January 1996, as they petitioned the New Jersey Presbytery to form a committee on creation days. The resolution of the committee, which reported in February 1997, was titled “Affirmations and Denials Regarding the Interpretation of Genesis One”.²⁵⁴ Unhappy with this resolution, the Mt. Carmel Session forwarded their complaint to the 25th General Assembly. The “Affirmation” included a denial “that the theories held by the physical sciences, history, sociology or anthropology are to be preferred over Scripture when it speaks to an issue” and a caveat that no presbyter has the right “to privately judge the consistency of his views with the Westminster Standards when they differ in any respect whatever from the Standards”.²⁵⁵ The “Affirmation” went on to “deny any doctrine of the gradual evolution of human species from more primitive life forms” and affirmed “that one natural interpretation of Genesis One is the 24-hour day exposition” while

²⁵³ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 103-122)

²⁵⁴ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 103)

²⁵⁵ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 105)

insistently denying “that the 24-hour day interpretation is the only exegetically possible interpretation”.²⁵⁶

This incredibly conservative resolution did not go far enough for the Mt. Carmel Session, as they sought a definitive statement maintaining the orthodoxy of only one view for Genesis One. The complaint to the General Assembly argued that *Affirmations and Denials* “denies the plain and ordinary sense of the creation account as revealed in Genesis One”. Mt. Carmel sought “only one single, right interpretation of creation days”.²⁵⁷ The New Jersey Presbytery made a counter-argument that the Westminster phrase “within the space of six days” does not of necessity mean “24-hour days”.²⁵⁸ The majority opinion of the Standing Judicial Committee was to rule in favor of the presbytery over the Mt. Carmel session. The ruling was not an affirmation of multiple acceptable views of the meaning of days, rather it was a judgment made “on the right of a church court to determine questions of doctrine and discipline properly brought before it”.²⁵⁹ The Standing Judicial Committee was acting on the precedent of the 19th General Assembly statement that “the PCA has granted a measure of freedom... in the area of creation, where some may hold to a form of ‘age-day’ creation”.²⁶⁰ The Standing Judicial

²⁵⁶ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 106)

²⁵⁷ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 106)

²⁵⁸ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 107)

²⁵⁹ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 107)

²⁶⁰ [M19GA, 1991, p. 84 Case 90-8, Bowen, see also Exhibit F, p. 545] Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 107)

Commission denied the complaint, though with a significant minority: 12 concurring, 9 dissenting, 2 recused, and 1 absent.²⁶¹

Dr. Collins, remarking on this incident, was surprised that Mt. Carmel even brought the complaint to the General Assembly. “That controversy was for a lot of people in the denomination strange because we already had a gentleman’s agreement [that] we shouldn’t be revisiting this (having already made decisions in 1995 and 1997)”.²⁶² He recalled that there was “a significant minority that was very unhappy”.²⁶³ The respective minority and concurring opinions were quite telling. The minority opinion held “that there is only one acceptable view in the PCA – the ‘24 hour day’ view”, while the concurring opinion affirmed that the 24-hour day view “is not the only possible faithful interpretation”.²⁶⁴ The concurring opinion attempted to reach a middle ground that “all agree that God created ‘in the space of six days,’ but they do not agree that the word ‘day’ must only be interpreted as a ‘24 hour day’”.²⁶⁵

The authors of the concurring opinion then made a hotly contested assertion, namely that this issue “is not a question of orthodoxy, or of keeping the PCA from going liberal”.²⁶⁶ In order to back their assertion, appeals were made to Charles and A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, and other classic conservative

²⁶¹ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 107)

²⁶² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

²⁶³ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

²⁶⁴ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 108)

²⁶⁵ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 109)

²⁶⁶ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 109)

Presbyterians who “did not hold to the ‘24 hour day’ view”.²⁶⁷ Dr. Collins adamantly agreed, “traditional Presbyterians in this country usually think of the Princeton theologians as sort of a bastion of Presbyterian orthodoxy (Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, J. Gresham Machen). Those guys had a very nuanced approach to evolution”.²⁶⁸ Not all agreed with Collins or the concurring opinion on this matter. The minority report warned of “that slippery slope of culturally conditioned interpretation which has brought too many once sound denominations to disaster”.²⁶⁹

The Concerned Presbyterian had much vitriol to spit at this decision and the implications it brought with it. Rev. E. C. Case referred to this attempt to “legitimize the various non-literal [views] of the creation account” by appealing to Reformed luminaries as “particularly disturbing”.²⁷⁰ Rev. Case cautioned the denomination in this article that “however much they may have been right about other things, about this point they were wrong, and their error has produced mischief and opened the door to ... the final apostasy of the PCA if it is tolerated in our midst”.²⁷¹ Men such as Hodge, Warfield, and Machen were writing during the 19th century “when Darwinism was rising like an unstoppable tide”, and their reaction “must not be imported either to the framers of the confession or to the

²⁶⁷ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 110)

²⁶⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

²⁶⁹ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 122)

²⁷⁰ Case, E.C “Editorial.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 3 (July 1997): 1-4

²⁷¹ Case, E.C “Editorial.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 3 (July 1997): 1-4

Church courts from the 17th century to our own time”.²⁷² Rev. Case continued, “though these men were sound on perhaps as much as ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths percent of what they taught, this single departure was the seed from which has sprung up the bitter weed of apostasy”.²⁷³ This editorial particularly disturbed Dr. Chapell, who reminded the Executive Board of Covenant Theological Seminary that “the statement that these men who gave their lives to defending the Word of God against liberalism somehow ushered in the demise of our church not only is a horrible injustice, it discloses unfortunate attitudes behind the current debate that must be identified”.²⁷⁴ Particularly distressing was Rev. Case’s unwillingness to let men preach in the church “who agree with 99.44 percent of what we believe”.²⁷⁵ Chapell warned, “there is little question that our church will soon be rather small in size and even smaller in influence”.²⁷⁶

Such men as Rev. Case would cede nothing on this particular issue, viewing it as one of instrumental importance to the denomination. Sam Duncan aptly explained the mentality, “the PCA has always been looking for a bright line test to support one’s orthodoxy or unorthodoxy. Presbyterians are always looking for a way to say I’m more orthodox than you are”.²⁷⁷ The danger was not far from Grace Presbytery, the presbytery of both Sam Duncan and Rev. Case. Duncan recalled the drama surrounding Jeremy Jones, a young Covenant Seminary graduate seeking

²⁷² Case, E.C. “A Response: To the Endorsement of Erroneous Views of the Westminster Confession’s Teaching on Creation.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (October 1997): 1-5

²⁷³ Case, 3

²⁷⁴ Chapell

²⁷⁵ Chapell

²⁷⁶ Chapell

²⁷⁷ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

ordination from the Grace Presbytery Examination Committee as the Reformed University Fellowship pastor at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, where he was installed October 27, 1996.²⁷⁸ Recalling his ordination, Duncan emphasized, “He had a rather flippant attitude, as some do who graduate from Covenant Seminary”.²⁷⁹ When Jones came to the floor of Presbytery, he was asked about the length of the days of Creation, and he expressed some reservations as to their duration. However, no specific questions were asked of him, and he was approved by a large margin.²⁸⁰ Some time later, the presbytery got a complaint by certain preachers about approving this pastor.²⁸¹ Teaching Elder George G. Felton, Sr., filed a complaint to the presbytery on the case²⁸², which the presbytery denied on the grounds of insufficient evidence.²⁸³ Felton then appealed to the General Assembly.²⁸⁴ Because the Standing Judicial Committee minutes showed almost nothing except that the pastor had some reservations, Sam Duncan filed a request for the Standing Judicial Committee to send this case back to presbytery for an evidentiary hearing to figure out what Jones actually believed, because no one was really sure. Duncan surmised that Felton “was hoping to win the case based on no evidence”, and he withdrew the complaint at that particular point.²⁸⁵ Rev. Case

²⁷⁸ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXV) (p. 31)

²⁷⁹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

²⁸⁰ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

²⁸¹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

²⁸² Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXIV) (p. 107)

²⁸³ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXV) (p. 54-65)

²⁸⁴ Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly (63-64)

²⁸⁵ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015. and Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth General Assembly (103)

commented on this decision that Pastor Felton would make sure that the precise views of “any candidate who expresses reservations about or exceptions to the Standards” be carefully recorded in the future.²⁸⁶ Rev. Case was doubtful of a future in which he saw the General Assembly accept “this apostasy” and eventually sweep under the rug “those who refuse to accept it”.²⁸⁷

This firestorm was matched by other similar incidents throughout the denomination²⁸⁸, and shortly thereafter Central Carolina and Westminster Presbyteries sent overtures to General Assembly.²⁸⁹ The Central Carolina overture was entitled “Erect a Study Committee on Exegetical, Hermeneutical and Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3”, and it was joined by the Westminster presbytery overture to “Appoint Study Committee on Creation”.²⁹⁰ These overtures were answered in the affirmative by the General Assembly, and Duncan believed the motivation behind these was to paint those who believed in anything other than a literal twenty-four hour view as being less orthodox.²⁹¹ Duncan does not believe that there was even slight congregational pressure for these overtures to the General Assembly. In the early stages of formation, the conservative visionaries thought that it was an issue that people in the pews could understand and get

²⁸⁶ Case, E.C. “The Times and the Manners.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (October 1997): 8

²⁸⁷ Case, E.C. “The Times and the Manners.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (October 1997): 8

²⁸⁸ For other firestorms see “reports from other quarters”: Case, E.C. “The Times and the Manners.” *The Concerned Presbyterian Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (October 1997): 8

²⁸⁹ Minutes of the Twenty Sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (191-98)

²⁹⁰ Minutes of the Twenty Sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (191-98)

²⁹¹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

behind. In reality, “people don’t really care. We have been so attuned to the earth being billions of years old that most people take it for granted that it is... I hope I’m wrong”.²⁹² The views on creation, even literal ones, are probably just in the pews more as nostalgia than anything else. “Perhaps the congregants are even out and out Neo-Darwinian. At some time we might have been able to keep the Biblical and secular creation separated, but they are not as easily separated as they once were. At the end of the day, everyone does a [personal] pilgrimage throughout that”.²⁹³ Duncan attributes the History Channel, National Geographic, and the National Parks with bombarding Americans with information on the age of the earth as fact rather than as theory.

The whole controversy was truly a top down ordeal, primarily led by the ruling elders in the pews. Conservative elders throughout the congregation were looking for a test, a badge of orthodoxy. Duncan believes, “this is an issue that the ruling elder who is not particularly studied can grasp and understand”.²⁹⁴ At this time the conservative pastors were not on a full scale witch-hunt to oust pastors from the denomination, but perhaps in light of the final decision of the General Assembly they would have been more militant. “Some of the [holders of] more tangential views were fearful that they would have to make an exception or even be taken out of the church. The [final] vote we took on the issue [in 2000] ended discussion for all intents and purposes”.²⁹⁵ The decision had finally been made that

²⁹² Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

²⁹³ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

²⁹⁴ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

²⁹⁵ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

the issue of the creation days had become a dominant issue in the PCA that deserved the attention of a special committee. The Creation Study Committee, an ad interim committee appointed by the 26th General Assembly, to “study and review the issues surrounding the interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2 – i.e. the question of ‘the days of creation’” was thus born.²⁹⁶

Sam Duncan, the outgoing moderator from the 25th General Assembly gave an exhortation to the 26th General Assembly that would be more fitting than he realized at the time. He warned against “the seeds of apostasy [which] are all around us,” and encouraged the PCA to remain “faithful to her founding standards: chiefly the Bible, then the doctrinal standards”.²⁹⁷ In reference to the Creation debate and the meaning of the word “day” in the first chapter of Genesis, Duncan “commended the advice of Dr. Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Theological Seminary, that we “not go beyond Scripture”.²⁹⁸ Duncan cautioned those assembled against “going into liberalism as Princeton [Theological Seminary] or the old PCUS” and further insisted that Genesis 1 must “never be viewed as poetic in any way”.²⁹⁹ Duncan mused that the PCA has “passed through its adolescent years and is maturing”.

²⁹⁶ Gilchrist, Paul R. “Clerk's Letter - Report on the 26th General Assembly.” Presbyterian Church in America. July 31, 1998.
http://www.pcahistory.org/ga/actions/26thGA_1998_Actions_PRG.pdf.

²⁹⁷ See Shapiro article at <http://www.presbyteriannews.org/volumes/v4/3/duncan.htm>

²⁹⁸ <http://www.presbyteriannews.org/volumes/v4/3/duncan.htm>

²⁹⁹ <http://www.presbyteriannews.org/volumes/v4/3/duncan.htm>

Expressing gratitude to the PCA founders, he said: "I just hope that my generation will be as faithful as that generation".³⁰⁰

An ideological rift ensued, with the more conservative Presbyterians agreeing with Ken Ham's Answers in Genesis group that modern evolutionary science was a worldview opposed to Biblical Christianity. The more moderate, non-literal views of the creation days mirrored the national trend of the Intelligent Design community. The antagonists of the controversy were the literal six-day creationists who demanded an official PCA position. This test of orthodoxy, culminating in the Creation Study Committee, would bring the issue to the forefront of the denomination, and would have unintended consequences for the very conservative elders who demanded an official PCA position.

³⁰⁰ <http://www.presbyteriannews.org/volumes/v4/3/duncan.htm>

CHAPTER IV: THE CREATION STUDY COMMITTEE

The decision of the 1998 PCA General Assembly to appoint a Creation Study Committee now set the stage for PCA elders to thoroughly study the creation-days issue, as well as the issue of whether or not it was an exception to the Standards to teach non-literal views of creation. If proven as a valid exception, the debate extended further to whether or not exceptions could be taught. The elders who requested the formation of a study committee hoped that the denomination would reach a final, definitive position on all of these intertwined issues.

Sam Duncan got the firsthand opportunity to exhibit his faithfulness to the denomination when he was called upon by 26th General Assembly Moderator Kennedy Smartt to be committee chair of the newly formed committee.³⁰¹ Reflecting on his appointment as committee chair, Duncan claims that he had no particular knowledge of the issue at all at the time of the committee's inception.³⁰² Duncan

³⁰¹ Gilchrist, Paul R. "Clerk's Letter - Report on the 26th General Assembly." Presbyterian Church in America. July 31, 1998.
http://www.pcahistory.org/ga/actions/26thGA_1998_Actions_PRG.pdf.

³⁰² Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

acted as “the required lawyer and referee of the committee”³⁰³, and Collins applauded Duncan in this role as “brilliant”.³⁰⁴

Smartt was in charge of appointing all of the other members of the committee, taking advice from various seminary presidents on whom to appoint. Jack Collins reflected that he and the other members “learned of our appointment sometime in the fall of 1998”.³⁰⁵ The committee began getting together from the end of 1998 to the beginning of 1999. They reported to the 27th General Assembly in 1999 that they were meeting and working, and they asked for a yearlong extension.³⁰⁶ They were granted this extension, and they met in Charlotte, North Carolina, on the campus of Reformed Theological Seminary during September for a very sharp fall meeting with much banter.³⁰⁷ They reported in 2000 at the General Assembly in Tampa, after two years of mostly individual work.³⁰⁸ They had a few telephone or email conversations, and the formal meetings were quarterly until they reported in June of 2000. The last meeting of the group was in March 2000, and they were not quite finished, which warranted a telephone conversation in April or May

³⁰³ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁰⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁰⁵ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁰⁶ Minutes of the Twenty Seventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (96-97)

³⁰⁷ Shapiro, Robert, Frank J. Smith, and Penelope Abraham-Smith. "Creation Study Committee Meets in Charlotte." The Presbyterian International News Service. <http://www.presbyteriannews.org/volumes/v5/4/creation-study-committee-meets-in-charlotte.html>.

³⁰⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

of 2000. “We sealed the deal and were happy that we could all agree with what we were presenting”.³⁰⁹

In the selection process, Smartt went through great lengths to make sure there were many different sides of the view presented. Naturally, the committee was heavy on the side of theologians and historians, and Collins claimed to be the only exegete (a Biblical specialist) on the whole committee.³¹⁰ Teaching Elders on the committee included William S. Barker, II, C. John Collins, J. Ligon Duncan, III, Howard Griffith, W. Duncan Rankin, Morton H. Smith, and William H. Smith. Ruling elders for the committee consisted of only three scientists: Dr. Mark Wardell, Dr. John Dishman, and Dr. Stuart Patterson. Dr. Wardell received his medical degree from the Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis³¹¹. Dr. Dishman held a physics PhD and was a retired physicist from the Dallas/Ft. Worth area³¹². Dr. Stuart Patterson, an adamant Young-Earth Creationist, served as academic dean, dean of faculty, chairman of the Department of Chemistry and professor of chemistry at Furman University. Dr. Patterson had retired in 1988 after 34 years, and his list of accolades included being a NASA project scientist and the author of the textbook

³⁰⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³¹⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³¹¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³¹² <http://johndishman.com/retirement/>

Principles of Chemistry.³¹³ He received his PhD in Chemistry from the University of North Carolina.

Collins stressed that external scientific creationism movements had “no specific influence on what they did in the committee as a whole, but it influenced the way that individual members thought. [There was] no pandering to those groups in the committee”.³¹⁴ At least one of the study committee members was strongly influenced by Ken Ham and Answers in Genesis, and another member was sympathetic to them. Dr. Patterson was “very frank” about his attachments to Answers in Genesis. The other two scientist were much more sympathetic to either Hugh Ross’ Reasons to Believe³¹⁵ or else the Discovery Institute (which Collins himself had been in contact with).³¹⁶ Clearly, there was adequate ideological representation from the relevant anti-Darwinistic organizations to help decide which direction the denomination would take into the 21st century.

Collins commended Duncan for having committee members talk about who they were and why they thought they were on the committee at the first meeting, in a sort of meet and greet. Many of the members were not familiar with each other face to face at this point in the process.³¹⁷ Collins recalled having met Ligon Duncan

³¹³ byFaith. "Stuart Patterson Home With the Lord." <http://byfaithonline.com/stuart-patterson-home-with-the-lord/>; GTPS Online. "Dr. Stuart Patterson Taken Home to Glory." <http://gptsnews.gpts.edu/2014/11/dr-stuart-patterson-taken-home-to-glory.html>. Patterson, Charles Stuart, Harry S. Kuper, and T. Ray Nanney. *Principles of Chemistry*. Irvington Pub, 1967.

³¹⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³¹⁵ Hugh Ross is an American astrophysicist who accepts the scientific age of the earth, and promotes forms of Old-Earth Creationism such as progressive and day-age creation. For more see Ross, Hugh. "Who We Are." Reasons to Believe. <http://www.reasons.org/about/who-we-are/hugh-ross>.

³¹⁶ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³¹⁷ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

in London while they were in the United Kingdom together during their respective PhD studies (Duncan was a recent graduate of Covenant Seminary at the time). Collins knew Dr. Morton Smith because of his prominence within the PCA, and he was slightly familiar with Dr. Will Barker. Dr. Dishman's son came to Covenant Seminary, so Collins knew the family.³¹⁸ Collins commented that with such a diverse group of thinkers, "we had a lot of work to do to let ourselves let our hair down. Sam's goal was that we would not be opponents to one another".³¹⁹

Kennedy Smartt very wisely charged us at our very first meeting, and we really needed that. [He said] You guys have to do a service to the church with this study committee report.³²⁰ I think Sam took that to heart and tried to get us to talk about where we were coming from, what were our influences and so forth.³²¹

The committee aimed to produce a statement that everyone involved could sign on to. They recognized that there were concerns raised by different groups, and they wanted to speak to those concerns and try to give some advice as to how people could move forward and reconcile those concerns. While almost everyone on the committee had a point of view, Collins claims, "for the most part, we were thinking about the bigger picture of how our church was going to survive into the 21st century and so forth".³²²

The denomination's national relevance in a new century was not exactly how Duncan himself saw the function of the committee. Duncan saw the task of the

³¹⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³¹⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³²⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³²¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³²² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

committee as one “to present the strengths and weaknesses of the various views on the creation days in relatively easy language in order for the people within the denomination to have a reference tool to go to”.³²³ There was an incredible diversity of views, from the analogical day view of Collins (a modification of his previous anthropomorphic day view) to the literal twenty-four hour day view of Duncan, and congregants had a right to know in explicitly clear language what the different views causing so much contention actually were. The committee decided that they needed to have a description of the views that were held by members of the committee - letting the advocates of those views give the description for a fair hearing. After hearing the views, they would discuss the various strengths and weaknesses. Frame suggested that Machen’s children have often “gone to great lengths to read their opponents’ words and motivations in the worst possible sense (often worse than possible) and to present their own ideas as virtually perfect: rightly motivated and leaving no room for doubt”.³²⁴ Despite this recurrent tendency, Duncan was proud of the way business was handled throughout. “We were all very well behaved. Everyone got the floor to say what they wanted to say, how they wanted to say it”.³²⁵

The Report of the Creation Study Committee began with an introductory statement, boasting of the “profound unity”³²⁶ among committee members as to the issues “of vital importance to our Reformed testimony”.³²⁷ The points unanimously

³²³ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³²⁴ Frame, 27

³²⁵ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³²⁶ Miller, Rachel. "PCA Creation Study Committee: Unity and Diversity, but No Evolution." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/pca-creation-study-committee-unity-and-diversity-but-no-evolution/>.

³²⁷ Creation Study Committee Report (2)

agreed upon included the coherent authorship of Moses, the historicity of the Genesis account, creation *ex nihilo*, the special creation of Adam and Eve (not products of evolution from lower life forms), and a historical fall of man that brought sin and misery.³²⁸ Next came a background to the current discussion, which the committee admitted is “a humble one”. In fact, the issue of the duration or extent of the creation days was never addressed at any ecclesiastical council; nor did it ever become a part of any ecumenical creeds. Nevertheless, they stressed that the truth claims of historic Christianity and modern secularism, which uses a naturalistic view of evolution, were at odds. “The doctrine of creation undergirds all truth”.³²⁹ The report then unfolded the history of the discussion, ranging from the ancients to the Reformers and into the present day. An insightful comment was made by the ancient church father Jerome, “the Rabbis prohibited anyone under thirty from expounding this chapter”, due to its difficulty of interpretation.³³⁰ Nineteenth-century Calvinists who were worried that non-literal readings would “destroy all confidence in the volume of inspiration” were the first to view the interpretation of this passage as one of serious import.³³¹

While Sam Duncan sought to present the report as a reference tool for people within the denomination to go to and have the strengths and weaknesses of the views presented, Collins kept returning to the theme of national relevance and 21st century survival with the report. Along the way of discussing the report, Ligon

³²⁸ Creation Study Committee Report (2)

³²⁹ Creation Study Committee Report (2)

³³⁰ Creation Study Committee Report (4)

³³¹ Creation Study Committee Report (6)

Duncan and Will Barker discussed questions pertaining to the history of the issue of creation days within Presbyterianism, within American Presbyterian, the PCA and also within the RCPES. Duncan Rankin had looked at documents coming out of the conversations between the initial PCA (1973) and the RCPES (which joined the PCA in 1982) and made connections between the denominational mergers and the issue of creation. Rankin was of the perspective of there being only one confessional view, the calendar day reading of Genesis. Despite holding to this viewpoint, he made two revelations that shed much light. “First of all, the discussion of the Creation Days was not a part of the discussion between the PCA and RCPES. Secondly, the RCPES in joining the PCA was not being asked to become Southern Presbyterians”.³³² Collins stressed that regarding the creation days “there is a difference between Thornwell/Dabney on one side and your Princeton Guys on the other side”.³³³ He interpreted this merger as the PCA attempting to recapture some of the idea of a national Presbyterian church and therefore not a specifically regional church. “It was Duncan [Rankin] who made that clear to us, and that was very, very helpful because the RCPES had already crossed that bridge [had their discussions [on the creation days] back in the 1960s). A lot of this stuff just came out as we met”.³³⁴

The report notes that there was a diversity of opinion on the nature of the creation days at the founding of the PCA in 1973, and even greater diversity with the reception of the RCPES in 1982, but it was never a controversial issue. Reasons for the current tensions were enumerated as follows. Certain Presbyterian elders were

³³² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³³³ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³³⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

pushing an emphasis on the 24-hour Day view “as a test of orthodoxy”; the report also mentioned the circulation of a home-schooling curriculum that came “from a young-earth creationist perspective, with a polemic against ‘non-literal views’”.³³⁵ Collin spoke of a strong homeschooling and Christian school contingent in the PCA. “Most homeschoolers get their material from people like Answers in Genesis or Jay Wile, those sorts of things. Some of them would be horrified to think there would even be a discussion. Others would really welcome a discussion, and some are asking ‘why do we even care?’”³³⁶ Additional reasons for the flare up of the controversy included fear that non-literal interpretations would “undercut the inspiration and authority of Scripture”, licensure and ordination examinations that have “provoked adverse reactions”, and “higher expectations” in these examinations, along with more “wide-ranging questioning in presbyteries”.³³⁷

The report then gave a brief section of definitions, followed by a description of the main interpretations of Genesis 1-3 and the Creation Days³³⁸. The task of the committee was very specific in its examination of the length and extent of the Creation Days. Duncan stressed that the age of the earth is an entirely different question than the length of the days and maintains that the two cannot be meshed together. Even committee member Morton Smith allowed for the age of the earth to be between 10,000 to 100,000 years old.³³⁹ Despite this distinction and narrowing

³³⁵ Creation Study Committee Report (7)

³³⁶ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³³⁷ Creation Study Committee Report (7-8)

³³⁸ For a brief overview of the four views see Ross, Hugh. "Four Views of the Biblical Creation Account ." Reasons to Believe. <http://www.reasons.org/articles/four-views-of-the-biblical-creation-account>.

³³⁹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

of task, it is obvious that the numerous issues of origins cannot be completely separated. Boasting a PhD in lexicography, Dr. Collins thought it sensible that the committee clarify the different meanings of potentially ambiguous words in a definitions section. “We had individual parties who were tasked to write these various sections – they were then shredded by the whole committee (which went through everything line by line)”.³⁴⁰

The committee agreed on creation ex-nihilo and was uniform in its opposition to the theistic evolution, defined in its most precise sense as God simply designing “a world which has within itself all the capacities to develop life and its diversity”³⁴¹, which they decided has no basis at all. Nobody in the group, not even the scientists were “sympathetic to a purely naturalistic type of evolution”, despite a variety of perspectives on evolution being held by the committee.³⁴² Of the several different definitions of evolution, only this one was deemed problematic, and the others were left open to discussion. A purely natural process from the beginning to the end was condemned, but while open to discussion, the other versions of evolutionary thought were grouped into a much broader category of “change through time”.³⁴³ Collins accuses young-earth creationists of not making clear distinctions for the various definitions of evolution. “[It was a] great achievement to establish more than one definition of this word. Other definitions are open for discussion”.³⁴⁴ Also contained in the definitions section was a proposed designation

³⁴⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁴¹ Creation Study Committee Report (12)

³⁴² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁴³ Creation Study Committee Report (p. 46)

³⁴⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

of science as “disciplines that study features of the world around us, looking for regularities as well as attempting to account for causal relations. In the causal chains we allow all relevant factors (including supernatural ones) to be considered”.³⁴⁵

After the definitions section, the various interpretations of the creation days were presented. Each interpretation was followed by a section of objections. The first interpretation presented was the Calendar-Day interpretation, which espouses that the meaning of the six days in which God created everything out of nothing were six solar days. The holders of this view reminded the reader “this has been the most commonly held understanding of this account in both Jewish and Christian history”.³⁴⁶ They also warned that shying away from this view was “opening the door to the undermining of the credibility of [the] gospel message”, and that “a theology wed to the science of one age is a widow in the next”.³⁴⁷ Finally, they drew historical connections to the Southern Presbyterians (Dabney, Thornwell, Giardeau) who resisted the broadening of the church on this point, as well as resistance to the action of the 1969 PCUS General Assembly to allow for theistic evolution views to be held.³⁴⁸ In the objections portion of the Calendar-Day interpretation, the authors made it clear “that special revelation must govern our understanding of general

³⁴⁵ Creation Study Committee Report (12)

³⁴⁶ Creation Study Committee Report (14)

³⁴⁷ Creation Study Committee Report (14, 17)

³⁴⁸ Creation Study Committee Report (17)

revelation”, giving preference to the Bible over the current body of scientific knowledge.³⁴⁹

The second interpretation was the Day-Age Interpretation, which holds that the six days were “periods of indefinite length and not necessarily of 24 hours duration”.³⁵⁰ The fact that this viewpoint “accommodates the preponderance of inference from present day scientific interpretation from general revelation, in particular with data from astrophysics, geology, and the fossil record” placed the Day-Age Interpretation at odds with Calendar-Day.³⁵¹ The third interpretation was the Framework Interpretation, which sees the creation week as “a poetic figure and that several pictures of creation history are set within six work-day frames not chronologically but topically”.³⁵² As this interpretation strays away from a chronological succession and a historical succession of time, it becomes the least defensible position of the four within the parameters set by the Creation Study Committee. The final view, and the one held by Collins, was the Analogical Days Interpretation. This view stresses the analogous nature (not the identical nature) of the days of Genesis to the workdays of man, “structured for the purpose of setting a pattern for our own rhythm of rest and work”.³⁵³ Like the Day-Age view, the Analogical Days view sees the days as “successive periods of unspecified length”, and views the length of time for the creation week as “irrelevant to the communicative purpose of the account”.³⁵⁴ All of the four views had to wrestle with

³⁴⁹ Creation Study Committee Report (19)

³⁵⁰ Creation Study Committee Report (121)

³⁵¹ Creation Study Committee Report (25)

³⁵² Creation Study Committee Report (26)

³⁵³ Creation Study Committee Report (29)

³⁵⁴ Creation Study Committee Report (30); also see John Collins work

issues of the original intent of Moses to his Israelite audience, and whether or not a largely illiterate audience would be able to grapple with and understand complex issues of science and hermeneutics given the respective positions being espoused and defended.

Several “fringe” interpretations were next explained, though not given serious consideration, by the committee report. Despite much support for a literal reading of the Genesis account leading up to the formation of the committee, Duncan does not believe that the members of the committee could have gotten a majority for the view; although, he believes that serious study of the passage precludes all but the calendar day interpretation. “My opinion was the more you looked at it and studied it, the more you would tend to come down on the literal twenty-four hour side. I suspect that we could have gotten a bare majority at best for the literal twenty-four hour view. Even if that had been the committee recommendation, I doubt whether it would have been approved [by the General Assembly]”.³⁵⁵

Duncan can be viewed as representative of those in the committee holding to the Calendar Day View. He sees no contradiction between being a convicted twenty-four hour creationist and being scientifically minded. “My particular view is that it fits in pretty well [with science]. If science says the Earth is billions of years old, that doesn’t defeat the concept, idea, and teaching of who created it”.³⁵⁶ Duncan maintains that the earth could have been created with billions of years of age, and he points out that carbon dating is proving to be less and less reliable. His

³⁵⁵ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁵⁶ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

epistemology stresses that science is a fluid, moving thing as different ideas are discovered, proven and disproven. Duncan is not conflicted in his belief of a literal six-day creation. Especially compelling for him is the Biblical account supporting a literal reading. “To get to all those other ones, you have to do some pretty good mental gymnastics to get there. Twenty-four hour is the easy read version”.³⁵⁷ Like many scientific creationists, Duncan believes in microevolution with no macroevolution; a fossil record that might have been created with the appearance of age; and a universal Noachian flood. Striking continuity with the beliefs of John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris is apparent.

Collins disagrees: “I don’t think that all four of those views are equally viable options scientifically or exegetically. The different views have different approaches to the sciences”.³⁵⁸ According to Collins, the Calendar Day View attempts to dictate to the sciences how the theory should look. The Day Age View tries to coordinate reading the Bible with the sciences. “In my view, that’s not really doing the right thing for the science or for the Bible”.³⁵⁹ For Collins, the Framework view and the Analogical Day view are better exegetically and they also recognize where the Bible is concerned to speak and where it leaves human beings free to explore. Collins recalls as a joke in the study committee that through the exploration of these ideas, it sorted out that people came in as representatives of those four views, but they ended up mostly going with either the Calendar Day View or with the Analogical Day View. “We thought that was ironic, it’s kind of like a survival of the fittest sort of

³⁵⁷ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁵⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁵⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

thing”.³⁶⁰ Collins thinks that trend is indicative of “the way it will eventually play out in the PCA. Those are the two views that are out there and they represent very different stances toward the Bible and towards the sciences”.³⁶¹ He predicts both views will stand the test of time in the PCA.

The next section of the report wrestled with the divisive issue of the original intent of the Westminster Assembly. The report noted that the interpretation of the phrase “in the space of six days” had “received more attention in the last three years than in the previous three-hundred-fifty”.³⁶² Three interpretations were given for the original intent. The first interpretation was that the Assembly actually meant six literal calendar days. The next interpretation was that the evidence was not strong enough “to conclude that the Assembly wished to exclude any view other than the instantaneous view of Augustine”.³⁶³ The final interpretation was that the Assembly simply wished to express whatever Scripture itself means when using the phrase “in six days”.³⁶⁴ After explaining each of the three interpretations of intent, the report gave its final advice and counsel to the General Assembly. Unable to reach unanimity, the committee recognized “that good men will differ on some other matters of interpretation of the creation account” and encouraged the church to “recognize honest differences”.³⁶⁵ The committee asserted “a naturalistic worldview

³⁶⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁶¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁶² Creation Study Committee Report (34)

³⁶³ Creation Study Committee Report (35)

³⁶⁴ Exodus 20:11 NKJV

³⁶⁵ Creation Study Committee Report (39)

and true Christian faith are impossible to reconcile, and [we] gladly take our stand with Biblical supernaturalism”.³⁶⁶

After gathering their conclusions, the committee made a significant caveat to their presentation that would send the 28th General Assembly into frenzy. Part of their report (before certain rule changes came into effect) included an adoption of a special rule under Robert’s Rules of Order.³⁶⁷ The Creation Committee Report could be voted up or down, but it could not be amended. Duncan explained that the committee members were fearful of a long, dragged out fight on the floor of the General Assembly. They were trying to avoid such a fight by the presentation of this special rule.³⁶⁸ The final proposal of the Creation Study Committee report was that the report “be distributed to all sessions and presbyteries of the PCA and made available for others who wish to enjoy it”; that “the Assembly declare its sense that in order to permit careful and prayerful contemplation of this matter, no further action of any kind with respect to this report be taken by the General Assembly for a period of at least two years”; and that “this study committee be dismissed with thanks”.³⁶⁹

At the 28th General Assembly, the committee members took their time and presented the different views so that those attending could get a clear understanding of what each of the views represented. Interestingly, the adoption of the special rule was debated for an hour and fifteen minutes while the actual report

³⁶⁶ Creation Study Committee Report (39)

³⁶⁷ *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 1990 ed. pp. 533-34

³⁶⁸ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁶⁹ Creation Study Committee Report (40)

lasted only an hour. After the presentation of the report, a strange union formed whenever the voting took place. “The committees recommendation was defeated because of this unholy alliance (the more broadly minded folks on the left and the more narrow thinking folks on the right). They banded together unknowingly and voted down the committee recommendation to study for a year”.³⁷⁰ The report actually foresaw this happening, by predicting “advocacy for change in the PCA in both broader and narrower directions”.³⁷¹ Consequently, the committee’s recommendation was defeated and there was no more special rule in effect, and so it became “live and on the floor again”.³⁷²

David Hall, pastor of Midway Presbyterian Church, was the first to reach the microphone in the race to the speaking stand that ensued, and he motioned that the General Assembly adopt the twenty-four hour view as the exclusive, acceptable view.³⁷³ The motion was defeated, and in fact was not even particularly close to passing.³⁷⁴ Frank Barker, pastor of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham and one of the founders of the PCA, made the motion that eventually carried. He motioned that any of the four views espoused by the Creation Study Committee Report be deemed acceptable. The amendment that he proposed was to replace the recommendation to study for two years without any further action on the part of the General Assembly with the following: “that since historically in Reformed theology there has been a diversity of views of the creation days among

³⁷⁰ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁷¹ Study Committee Report (8)

³⁷² Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁷³ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁷⁴ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

highly respected theologians, and since the PCA has from its inception allowed a diversity, that the Assembly affirm that such diversity as covered in this report is acceptable as long as the full historicity of the creation account is accepted”.³⁷⁵

The General Assembly approved this motion by a clear majority, albeit not an overwhelming one.³⁷⁶ “That’s how we got the mess that we got now”, lamented Duncan of the General Assembly decision.³⁷⁷

Collins agreed that Frank Barker’s motion was not at all what the Creation Study Committee members had in mind. “The motion that Frank Barker presented did not represent the unanimous view of the study committee [which was to simply commend the report to study by the local congregations]”.³⁷⁸ He continued by saying, “I don’t think everybody on the study committee actually supported Frank Barker’s motion. Barker wanted to go further than simple commendation, “because the committee had done its job and particularly articulated four main views, he wanted the General Assembly to say so long as a candidate comes to a presbytery holding one of these four views, he’s not going to be considered outside of our bounds so long as he can affirm certain things about Genesis as history and Adam and Eve”.³⁷⁹ This motion came from the floor and not from the committee, and it passed. “By that time, it was an every man vote his own conscience kind of thing”.³⁸⁰ Collins recalled a sizeable minority voting against the motion, and many of these dissenters registered and signed their names to a protest. The next morning they

³⁷⁵ Creation Study Committee Report (40)

³⁷⁶ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁷⁷ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁷⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁷⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁸⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

tried to pass a move to reconsider, the very first thing before the assembly hall was filled, which was unsuccessful. “That’s parliamentary procedure; it was legitimate to do that but it was a little bit dodgy because you’re taking advantage of the fact that people aren’t there yet”.³⁸¹ This move to make the General Assembly reconsider was unsuccessful.³⁸²

Collins attributes the “pretty raucous General Assembly in 2000” to the issue being treated as “make or break back in the 90s”.³⁸³ At successive General Assemblies there were efforts to reverse the decision of the 2000 General Assembly, which were soundly defeated by very large margins (3:1 or more).³⁸⁴ Collins recalls, “it was portrayed as a make or break issue in the 90s, but the way it was resolved in the General Assembly in 2000, it sort of receded to the background”.³⁸⁵ Calling the decision a resolution, however, is far from accurate. The 2000 General Assembly proclamation that a candidate for licensure in the PCA holding one of the four views espoused by the Report of the Creation Study Committee be counted as acceptable does not actually have any binding, legal clout. “The General Assembly cannot force the individual presbyteries to abide by that, so there are actually presbyteries that don’t abide by that and they actually will not permit someone to work in their bounds who don’t adhere to a Young-Earth Creationists view”.³⁸⁶ In the Concurring Opinion of the New Jersey Case 97-5 at the 26th General Assembly it was said that “if

³⁸¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁸² Minutes of the Twenty Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (213)

³⁸³ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁸⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁸⁵ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁸⁶ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

those who hold that the “24 hour day” view is the only acceptable view for the PCA want to establish that as the official standard for the PCA, the proper approach would be through the formal amendment process in the *BCO 29*”.³⁸⁷ Sam Duncan, legal expert for Presbyterian law, commented: “Saying the four views are acceptable doesn't mean they are acceptable – without either amending the Book of Church Order or the Confession of Faith, that doesn't bind any presbytery or any session”.³⁸⁸ No presbytery or session is bound by the decision of the General Assembly; in fact, the General Assembly decision serves only as pastoral advice and not as law. “You can't use a position paper adopted by the General Assembly as law. Can't try someone or hold someone up to the Book of Church Order or Confession of Faith”.³⁸⁹ Collins referred to the decision as “more of a moral authority than an actual legally binding kind of authority”.³⁹⁰

Since the ruling of the General Assembly, the issue has mostly been put to rest in the PCA from an official standpoint. This brought some peace to the denomination, but there are presbyteries that ignore the advice of the General Assembly outright. Westminster Presbytery in Tennessee has the position that if a pastor seeking ordination does not adhere to the twenty-four hour view, then he will not be accepted.³⁹¹ Collins comments, “they have been very public and very

³⁸⁷ Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1998) (p. 113)

³⁸⁸ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁸⁹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁹⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁹¹ Ball, Larry. “Westminster Presbytery (PCA) – Are the Rumors True? Westminster Presbytery (PCA) – Are the Rumors True?” The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/westminster-presbytery-pca-are-the-rumors-true/>.

explicit about that”.³⁹² Mississippi-Valley Presbytery also adopted this position at their June 1998 presbytery meeting.³⁹³ Fearing that “the very integrity of Scripture is put in jeopardy by any view that differs from that plainly taught in Scripture”, teaching elder Jack Scott made a motion that those holding to a different view than the literal six day creationism “ought not to be approved to hold the office of teaching or ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church in America”.³⁹⁴ This motion was approved with only four dissenting votes.

Even in Mississippi-Valley Presbytery, exceptions abound. Upon seeking a transfer of ordination, Pastor Darwin Jordan was approved to serve in Mississippi-Valley Presbytery at Highlands Presbyterian Church despite holding views of the Creation Days at odds with the twenty-four hour view. Furthermore, he was approved for ordination as the very next order of business after adopting the literal view caveat to the Mississippi-Valley Presbytery standing rules.³⁹⁵ Duncan explained that the presbytery made this exception because Darwin Jordan was an intimate of pastors within the presbytery. “This was a mixed theological statement of saying we aren’t going to take any non-twenty-four hour folks but we are going to take Darwin Jordan because we know him”.³⁹⁶ At the October 1998 presbytery meeting of the Mississippi-Valley Presbytery, Jack Scott’s motion was rescinded.³⁹⁷

³⁹² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

³⁹³ Minutes of Mississippi-Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (June 19, 1998) (Appendix F)

³⁹⁴ Minutes of Mississippi-Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (June 19, 1998) (26.1012)

³⁹⁵ Minutes of Mississippi-Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (June 19, 1998) (26.1018)

³⁹⁶ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

³⁹⁷ Minutes of Mississippi-Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (October 20, 1998) (26.1038)

Two pastors who held non-literal views of the creation days, Ken Campbell and Bill Hogan, were approved for transfer at this meeting immediately following the decision to rescind Jack Scott's motion.³⁹⁸

Grace Presbytery, from which the conflict over Jeremy Jones ignited, never took an official position one way or another. Even so, Grace Presbytery has not accepted a single non-twenty-four hour preacher for ordination or transfer since the time of the General Assembly ruling. Two small exceptions can be found here with Pastors Sean Lucas and Ralph Davis. Lucas, the pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, recanted his formerly held twenty-four hour views at a May 2015 Presbytery meeting and now has a modified view of Jack Collins' analogical days view.³⁹⁹ Ralph Davis, former pastor at Woodlands Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, was accepted for transfer after presenting a satisfactory conviction for holding a non-twenty-four hour view.⁴⁰⁰ Duncan explained that certain degrees of flexibility exist for pastors who can defend their view from Scriptural text and the Confession of Faith. Ralph Davis is a preeminent Old Testament Scholar from Reformed Theological Seminary. "There's no uncertainty [about Grace Presbytery's exclusive commitment to the Calendar Day View], but

³⁹⁸ Minutes of Mississippi-Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (October 20, 1998) (26.1046)

³⁹⁹ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XLIII) (pg. 59)

⁴⁰⁰ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXX) (pg. 75-77)

there is a certain degree of flexibility because he can explain his view and he can do it very well”.⁴⁰¹

It should be noted that while the Creation Study Committee was still at work, two efforts were made to restrict the acceptable views of the Creation Days within Grace Presbytery. At an April Session meeting of the McDonald Presbyterian Church, a “Declaration” was adopted that gave zero tolerance to “any teaching elder seeking admittance to Grace Presbytery, or any other man seeking to be licensed or to become a candidate for ministry under care of Grace Presbytery” who held to a non-literal interpretation of the Creation Days.⁴⁰² The Declaration further made clear that “any view which departs from the confessional doctrine of creation in six 24 hour days strikes at the fundamentals of the system of doctrine set forth in Holy Scriptures”.⁴⁰³ Grace Presbytery dissented to have the “Declaration” of the McDonald Presbytery sent to all the other Sessions, but another attempt was soon made at narrowing the definition by another session in the presbytery.⁴⁰⁴ The Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Woodville, Mississippi, drafted an overture in June of 1999 that they wanted sent to the General Assembly. The overture resolved to affirm that God created “in the space of six, consecutive, ordinary days” and declared “the Presbytery of Grace will consider any view contrary to this one to be an exception to the fundamentals of our system of

⁴⁰¹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

⁴⁰² Called Meeting of the Session of McDonald Presbyterian Church on April 9, 1999

⁴⁰³ Called Meeting of the Session of McDonald Presbyterian Church on April 9, 1999

⁴⁰⁴ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXVII) (p. 100-102)

doctrine and constitutional standards”.⁴⁰⁵ The overture specifically called out the gap theory, day age theory, and the poetic and framework hypothesis as warranting an exception (at the time of this overture’s draft, the four “acceptable views” of the committee report had not yet been presented to the denomination). The overture concluded by threatening, “anyone who refuses to submit to the position of the Presbytery in this matter will be subject to discipline for failure to adhere to the fourth ordination vow (BCO 20-5)”.⁴⁰⁶ The motion to send this overture to the General Assembly was defeated, and no further action was taken on restricting the acceptable views of the creation days by this presbytery.

Collins commented on the subjectivity of decisions on this matter since the 2000 General Assembly. “Depending on who attends a particular presbytery meeting, it might or might not become an issue”.⁴⁰⁷ The General Assembly made its pronouncements and reaffirmed its pronouncements in the following couple of years, but that does not bind the presbyteries in terms of what they are going to do. The presbyteries do not have total control, however. A presbytery that decides not to ordain a candidate can be complained against, with the decision being appealed to the Standing Judicial Committee. The Standing Judicial Committee may or may not appeal to the General Assembly decisions as settling the issue, “you just don’t know how people are going to treat precedence and so forth”.⁴⁰⁸ Collins made it clear that it is not correct to say that there is an official PCA position on the subject, “what is

⁴⁰⁵ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXVII) (p. 126-128)

⁴⁰⁶ Minutes of Grace Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (Volume XXVII) (p. 126-128)

⁴⁰⁷ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴⁰⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

correct is to say that most people in the PCA figure that we shouldn't be fighting about this".⁴⁰⁹ Collins is unsure whether the lack of an official denominational position is a strength or weakness.

The vote taken in the General Assembly ended all official congregational study and consideration of the issue. Duncan believes that congregants did not care one way or another. Rather, conservative elders were driven by a desire to come up with a test of orthodoxy to stop the influences of the non-literal views. "This was motivated by a desire... a test of orthodoxy to stop those three lines of the non-literal views".⁴¹⁰ Duncan is confident that the denomination has experienced such an ideological shift since the ruling that even a one-third vote in favor of a denominational adoption of the twenty-four hour view could not be mustered on the floor of the General Assembly now.⁴¹¹ Ironically enough, the motivation behind all of this discussion to begin with was a test of orthodoxy within the denomination. The very presbyteries that presented overtures to the General Assembly to form a committee on this issue intended for the result to be a conclusive decision to accept the twenty-four hour view as the denomination's preferred stance. In a sort of backfire, the overtures only led to an expansion of the acceptable views.

As for the future of the denomination on the issue of the Creation Days, Duncan does not believe there will be imminent turmoil. The congregation "is not divided on the issue, it just isn't an issue anymore".⁴¹² More than anything, the

⁴⁰⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴¹⁰ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

⁴¹¹ Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

⁴¹² Duncan, Sam. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi November 6, 2015.

whole saga was a failure for those pleading for a more narrow view. Like Collins, Duncan does agree that a controversy is brewing over the horizon on the historicity of Adam and Eve, but the Creation Days argument has, at least for now, been concluded. Despite hearing many reports that the Creation Days argument will not be reopened, Collins gestures, “I think [the conservative elders] would like to, but maybe that’s just my opinion. I think they realize that they aren’t going to get anywhere if they do”.⁴¹³ While this particular issue may or may not come back, the questions going forward will be ones “of human origins and so forth”.⁴¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, definitions are intertwined throughout this discussion, and the Creation Study Committee even “laid down some boundaries for that discussion [the one of human origins], though a lot of people don’t really pay attention to what we said”.⁴¹⁵ Collins realizes that all serious Presbyterians have affirmed the miraculous nature of the creation of Adam and Eve, though the materials involved in their creation and the duration of the process are subject to debate. “Benjamin Warfield was very explicit on that, and so was J. Greshman Machen. They were willing to allow for intermediate steps (animals and pre-human hominids) but they insisted that it was still a miraculous process”.⁴¹⁶ Collins reasoned that the committee members did not want to write a report that would put these thinkers outside of the pale, and some of the historians on the committee who were not sympathetic to Warfield’s view still did not want to have him excluded

⁴¹³ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴¹⁴ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴¹⁵ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴¹⁶ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

from the perspective of orthodoxy. Simply affirming “there’s no natural path to human kind, that allows then the view of Warfield as within the pale”.⁴¹⁷ This particular issue was not voted on in the 2000 General Assembly, but it was appreciated as guidance given to the PCA, and it is contained in the study committee report. Collins affirms “there’s no natural path from animal to human being, that’s the operative part. Whatever might be the material component, there is some room for discussion there”.⁴¹⁸ He thinks that this issue will take increased prominence in the coming years. “That is probably going to come back, there have been efforts to make it an issue in the last several years”.⁴¹⁹ Presbyteries have sent overtures to the General Assembly, and they have been turned down every time. Clearly, there is a desire to bring the entire issue of origins back to the national denominational stage. Whether or not it will be granted an audience is yet to be seen.

What Collins does foresee for the denomination is a need to relate to the rest of the world in an intelligent, rational, and thoughtful way. While “there are lots of people for whom these are not major issues”, for some, the very credibility of the denomination is at stake.⁴²⁰ Collins sees the PCA sociologically as being better educated, whiter, and of higher income than the rest of the American culture. “For better or worse, that’s just us”.⁴²¹ He sees in this a burden to discuss these issues intelligently within this sociologic demographic or else “we lose credibility, or we lose our capacity to minister to people who are in that particular bracket”.⁴²² As

⁴¹⁷ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴¹⁸ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴¹⁹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴²⁰ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴²¹ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

⁴²² Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

such, Collins has made a concerted effort on his part to engage the culture through publication. He has published four major works on the issues of supernaturalism⁴²³, literary analysis of Genesis 1-4⁴²⁴, the faith/science conflict⁴²⁵, and the historicity of Adam and Eve.⁴²⁶ Reviews of these works have branded him everything from “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” to a “savior”.⁴²⁷ Collins presented ideas in these works that would certainly not be endorsed by those holding to a Calendar Day View of the Creation Days, but they have gained traction with the more scientifically minded members of the denomination.

Although official denominational discussion of the creation days had ceased, tensions between those holding to a literal view of Genesis and those who thought that a literal view could not be reconciled with science burst forth once again at the 40th General Assembly; however, this time those holding to non-literal views were on the offensive. At the 40th General Assembly, held in Louisville, Kentucky, in June 2012, two geologists, Dr. Gregg Davidson and Dr. Ken Wolgemuth, presented a seminar entitled “The PCA Creation Study Committee a Dozen Years Later: What Does Science Say Now?”, which purposed to “provide an update on the scientific evidence for an ancient earth using examples non-scientists can easily

⁴²³ Collins, C. John. *The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God's Action in the World*. Captain Fiddle Publications, 2000.

⁴²⁴ Collins, C. John. *Genesis 1-4: A linguistic, literary, and theological commentary*. P&R Publishing, 2006.

⁴²⁵ Collins, C. John. *Science and Faith: Friends Or Foes?*. Crossway, 2003.

⁴²⁶ Collins, C. John. *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?: Who They Were and why You Should Care*. Crossway, 2011.

⁴²⁷ Collins, Jack. Interview by author. Tape recording. Oxford, Mississippi October 23, 2015

apprehend".⁴²⁸ This seminar raised concern online among blogs and Facebook posts, as both presenters were a part of Solid Rock Lectures, which is a group that hosts workshops on reconciling evolution and an old earth with the Bible.⁴²⁹ Dr. Gregg Davidson, chair and professor of geology and geological engineering at the University of Mississippi and a faithful member of Christ Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Oxford, MS, contended, "most pastors and theologians... rely on information from young earth organizations that do not adequately or accurately reflect conventional scientific understanding".⁴³⁰ Bloggers raised concern over the seminar due to a perception that Old Earth Creationism was going to be presented as more scientifically credible than Young Earth Creationism.⁴³¹ Rachel Miller, posting in PCA News, was indignant:

What's interesting about this seminar is that while the PCA Creation Study Report does not take a position on the age of the earth, the speakers at this seminar do. The implication from the summary is that the science is settled, and therefore, we need to accept that Young Earth Creationism is not a viable position. According to the summary,

⁴²⁸ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>.

⁴²⁹ Davidson, Gregg, Ken Wolgemuth, and Joel Duff. Solid Rock Lectures: Earth as God's Creation. <http://solidrocklectures.org/contact-us.html>.

⁴³⁰ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>. See Dr. Davidson's book Davidson, G R. *When Faith and Science Collide: A Biblical Approach to Evaluating Evolution, Creationism, Intelligent Design, and the Age of the Earth*. Oxford, MS: Malius Press, 2009.

⁴³¹ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the PCA GA and the Age of the Earth Seminar." Naturalis Historia. <http://thenaturalhistorian.com/2012/06/21/pca-ga-age-earth-seminar-gregg-davidson/>. Duff, Joel. "PCA General Assembly includes a seminar on the age of the Earth." The GeoChristian. <http://geochristian.com/2012/06/13/>.

not only is YEC bad science, it also reflects badly on Christ as the author of truth. This is a very disturbing statement.⁴³²

A seminar description blatantly asked whether “our members are inadequately prepared to wrestle with challenges to their faith when encountering the actual scientific evidence.”⁴³³ Critics of the seminar alleged “this seminar is now questioning the credibility of Young Earth Creationism by asserting it does not have the scientific evidence to back it up”.ⁱ

Conservatives in the denomination were on high alert for this sort of notion after two overtures were introduced by Rocky Mountain Presbytery and Savannah River Presbytery to the General Assembly to “reaffirm the confessional position on the historicity of Adam”.⁴³⁴ These overtures sought to reaffirm that Adam and Eve were created “without any natural animal parentage of any kind, out of matter previously created” and they appeal to the 2000 PCA Creation Study Committee Report which affirmed the “special creation of Adam and Eve as actual human beings... (not the products of evolution from lower life forms)”.⁴³⁵ Those objecting to

⁴³² Miller, Rachel. "GA Seminar: No Room in the PCA for Young Earth Creationism?." A Daughter of the Reformation. <https://adaughterofthereformation.wordpress.com/2012/05/28/ga-seminar-no-room-in-the-pca-for-young-earth-creationism/>.

⁴³³ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>.

⁴³⁴ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>. The Aquila Report. "The PCA Rocky Mountain Presbytery Approves Overture on Historicity of Adam." <http://theaquilareport.com/the-pca-rocky-mountain-presbytery-approves-overture-on-historicity-of-adam/>. Aquila, Dominic. "PCA's Savannah River Presbytery Approves Overture Rejecting All Evolutionary View of Adam's Origin." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/pcas-savannah-river-presbytery-approves-overture-rejecting-all-evolutionary-view-of-adams-origin/>.

⁴³⁵ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>.

the seminar wondered whether it contradicted the already established Creation Study Committee Report's position, although the authors of the seminar pointed out that "the report encouraged the PCA to consider what additional scientific understanding might develop in the future to assist in answering the question of age".⁴³⁶ In the final analysis, those hosting the seminar made a strong statement that *"the seminar will explicitly acknowledge the authority and preeminence of scripture over natural evidence, while also recognizing that God's natural creation can sometimes aid in choosing between plausible biblical interpretations"*.⁴³⁷

In what was dubbed as "the young-earth follow up" to the seminar given by Dr. Davidson, a seminar entitled "Astronomy Reveals Creation" was given by Dr. Jason Lisle of the Institute of Creation Research (ICR) at the 2013 General Assembly in Greenville, South Carolina.⁴³⁸ Dr. Joel Duff, Professor of Biology at The University of Akron and member of Faith Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Akron, reflected on the state of the PCA coming out of these seminars in a 2013 article. He admitted, "the PCA is clearly divided on this issue". From conversations with pastors and elders to attending talks, conferences and blog chat room discussions, he surmised that "there is a fairly even split between committed young earth and old earth proponents in

⁴³⁶ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>.

⁴³⁷ Aquila, Dominic. "Proposed Seminar on Creation and Science at 2012 PCA General Assembly Stirs Debate ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/proposed-seminar-on-creation-and-science-at-2012-pca-general-assembly-stirs-debate-by-dominic-aquila/>.

⁴³⁸ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>. Listed also on ICR website <http://www.icr.org/event/1084/>

the PCA".⁴³⁹ He does not believe that this split is an even split; rather, "there is a strong core of committed young-earth-only proponents and a similar core of those convinced that the Bible does not speak to the age of the earth and accept the consensus of science supports an old earth".⁴⁴⁰ These core constituencies might represent 20-40% of the PCA leadership, while the remaining 60-80% "are undecided, noncommittal or at least non-vocal on this issue for a variety of reasons and where they fall on the creationism landscape of positions is much harder to gauge".⁴⁴¹

To offer a comprehensive picture of pastors within the denomination, he then divided the pastors into a possibility of five categories. In the first category were pastors who are committed to a young earth interpretation as the best and only valid interpretation of the Bible; these pastors were likely to be very vocal in the church and denomination as a whole. Next were those committed to a young earth interpretation, but not very vocal as they either at least acknowledge the possibility of valid alternative views or feel inadequately knowledgeable in science and literary analysis to vocalize their views. The third pastoral positions were those who accept young earth creationism as a default position but suppress serious

⁴³⁹ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>.

⁴⁴⁰ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>.

⁴⁴¹ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>.

doubts due to conflicting physical and/or Scriptural evidence to support an alternate view. These pastors do not vocalize themselves, but would lean towards young earth when pushed on the issue. Fourth are those pastors who accept the old earth view and have serious doubts about the plausibility of a young earth interpretation but are not vocal because they either struggle with old earth implications or serve a congregation with strong young earth views. Fifth and finally are those who accept an old earth and are convinced that the Bible supports their conclusions. These pastors view creation science as adverse to the advancement of the church going forward into a world of increasing scientific reliability. Duff suggests that categories one and five “are the vocal minorities that set the tenor of the debate in the PCA”, while the majority of the PCA finds themselves in categories three or four.⁴⁴² Duff does not believe that these pastors are able “to fully articulate a Biblical theology that allows for an old earth but they also understand that the young earth position is untenable scientifically and is theologically unsound”.⁴⁴³ In conclusion, a majority of the PCA pastorate is predicted to stay on the sidelines of

⁴⁴² Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>.

⁴⁴³ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>.

the debate because “the political and personal cost of becoming vocal is too great” for a pastor who is not strongly convicted one way or another.⁴⁴⁴

The seminars of the 2012 and 2013 General Assemblies showed clearly that the issue of the creation days, as well as the issues of human origins and the age of the earth, have not been decided conclusively within the denomination. So long as the parameters of the 2000 Creation Study Committee Report are upheld, it is unlikely that the denomination will ever take a stance on them. The failure of the 2000 General Assembly to establish a denominational stance on the length and extent of the creation days opened up the door to a broad range of interpretations concerning the relationship between science and religion, as well as the epistemological validity of various sources of truth. The 1973 split from the PCUS continued the tradition of division rather than unity when the church began to liberalize; however, the proper interpretation of Genesis could not be established as a true test of conservative orthodoxy. The PCA, a subscriptionists denomination, could not decide which issues truly warrant division. For the time being,

⁴⁴⁴ Duff, Joel. "Reflections on the 2013 PCA General Assembly and the Age of the Earth Some thoughts on the state of creationism in the PCA and on the seminar at the PCA General Assembly on young earth creation ." The Aquila Report. <http://theaquilareport.com/reflections-on-the-2013-pca-general-assembly- and-the-age-of-the-earth/>.

Presbyterians have been granted flexibility to examine this issue for themselves and hold to their ensuing convictions.

CONCLUSION

American Christians divided in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy over issues of Biblical interpretation. While all Fundamentalists upheld the Bible as being true and the inspired Word of God, not all Fundamentalists interpreted the creation account of Genesis as being a literal, historical account. Throughout the 20th century, a variety of non-literal views such as the gap theory, day-age theory, and progressive creationism were held by fundamentalists. With the advent of John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, scientific creationism became wildly popular among literal young-earth creationists, but it lost traction after being discounted by legal experts in the 1980s as pseudo-scientific. The Intelligent Design community emerged as young-earth creationists fervor subsided from the popular sphere in the 80s. The goal of this group was to encourage the teaching of design in public schools as an alternative to naturalistic evolution; however, the identity of the designer was not explicitly Judeo-Christian. From the late 1980s to present, the scientific creationism movement has reemerged with Ken Ham and Answers in Genesis, the

clear successor to the legacy left by Henry Morris and the Institute of Creation Research.

The PCA formed as a denomination, splitting from the PCUS in 1973, at a moment in history when anti-Darwinism in America was formulating its own identity. Both Christians holding to literal and non-literal views of the Genesis creation account offered strong opposition to Darwinistic evolution, but the two camps came into conflict in the PCA. While the two groups could have operated as allies to push back against naturalism in America, conservative elders in the PCA regarded those not holding to views identical to their own as being dangerous to the preservation of conservatism within the denomination. The more conservative elders of the denomination saw those holding non-literal views as compromising the source of ultimate truth – looking to the natural world rather than to the words of the Creator of the natural world. This set a dangerous precedent that conservative elders were not willing to compromise on, and the push to have one denominational view reflected how apprehensive these elders were about allowing the natural world to dictate interpretation of Scripture.

This particular controversy was likely not unique to the PCA, but it did manifest itself in peculiar ways within the denomination. The joining and receiving of the RCPES in 1982 moved the PCA from a regional manifestation to a national one, bringing in elements unfamiliar to the comfortable Southern identity that the PCA had established. The addition of Covenant Theological Seminary as the national seminary of the PCA only furthered the mistrust of those in the PCA who held twenty-four hour views. Seminary professors teaching non-literal views of Genesis

were given the stamp of legitimacy by belonging to the only official seminary of the denomination, and conservative elders who held to literal views felt pressure to push back and attempt to impose their convictions on the entire denomination.

Finally, being bound to the Westminster Standards added another dimension to the controversy. Various attempts were made to interpret what the Westminster Divines meant by “in the space of six days”, but it was incredibly difficult to reach consensus on the intent of the authors who wrote these six words hundreds of years ago in a completely different environment from the present day. The Westminster Divines wrote long before Darwinism was even introduced; attempts to impress the context of today on the setting of the past is a tricky venture. Whether or not non-literal views are an exception to the Standards is still open for debate, and whether or not exceptions should be taught or preached from the pulpit is an entirely different issue.

The PCA Creation Days Controversy offered an apt view into the ongoing conflict between fundamentalist religion and empirical science. By redefining science to include not just natural processes, but also a supernatural creator of the natural processes, many Christian scientists see a future harmony between the two. Other fundamentalist Christians mistrust science when it seems to be in conflict with their personal interpretation of the Bible, the source of ultimate truth for them. The ongoing conflict may never cease for them without either a reinterpretation of the sacred text in the light of plain science, or the scientific evidence in conflict with the passages of Scripture being definitively refuted. A trend is emerging in which more and more congregants and pastors within the PCA are reinterpreting Genesis

in light of the scientific evidence, but so long as a vocal minority exists, the struggle between those holding to literal and non-literal views may never cease.

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